ゼロの使い魔 7

〈銀の降臨祭〉

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫 J

Novel Illustrations

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。「カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて」（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に「グリーングリーン 緑ノ音ファンタスティック」「つっぱれ有栖川！」（共に角川スニーカー文庫）「描きかけのラブレター」（富士見ミステリー文庫）「サンタ・クラリス・クライシス」（富士見ファンタジア文庫）「グリーングリーン 緑ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー」（MF文庫J）など多数。小説連載も数多く手がけている（富士見ファンタジアバトルロイヤルなど）。「グリーングリーン」「Gonna Be!?」「ゆきうた」「私立アキババラ学園」「魔界天使ジブリール」「そらうた」など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

◎兎塚エイジ（うさつか・えいじ）
大阪出身、大阪在住の大阪人。8月16日生まれ。
趣味、サラリーマン。私とカボイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
今までの参加作品は「蒼ときめいろ」「電撃文庫」です。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／5tus

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ゼロの使い魔7　銀の降臨祭

才人がある日突然「召還」されてしまった異世界ハルケギニア。使い魔として、ご主人様のルイズとともに参戦したアルビオンとの戦いは、ひとまず連合軍――ルイズたちが勝利を収める。すっかり戦勝ムードでアルビオンとの決戦に備える連合軍だが、才人は先日の戦闘のことを引きずって元気がない。ルイズは才人を励まそうと、ちょっぴり大胆な振る舞いもしてみるが、才人は上の空。ルイズは殴ねてしまい、そんな彼女に才人は「俺ふられた！」と思いこみ、またも関係はこじれてしまう。そこへ、超美少年のロマリアの神官が現れる。ルイズは才人への反発から神官に思わせぶりな態度をとりはじめ……。異世界使い魔ファンタジー。波乱の第7弾！

ヤマグチノボルの本

- **グリーングリーン 緑ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー**［原作・監修／GROOVER　イラスト／くろたま海合］
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ゼロの使い魔 7

〈銀の降臨祭〉

ヤマグチノボル

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ゼロの使い魔7

銀の降臨祭（しろがね）

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫J

Chapter One: The Temperature Difference between the Two

A young lady with peach-colored hair was lying horizontally on the bed, with only a thin cape wrapped around her bare skin.

She was the one whom they call "Louise of the Void," otherwise known as Louise Françoise; only a few high ranking officers of the royal army knew of this secret.

It was now the end of the year, the second week in the month of Wynn. Going by Halkeginia's climate, it was the equivalent of autumn... still not considered very cold in the tent. Winter would have to wait until the coming of the new year. It was also because of this that she could dress so sexily without the fear of catching a cold.

On a simple bed, consisting of a piece of cloth draped over straw, Louise bit her small finger, and sulked indignantly. This gesture of hers had an unbelievable cuteness to it. On that porcelain doll-like face of hers surfaced a peach color, arising from discontent. Louise sat up, and hugged her knee.

This gesture of hers had a cuteness akin to a goddess'. With her feelings immediately written on her face, Louise could not completely hide the uneasiness in her heart. This unease caused some sort of dramatic change in Louise's girlish air, adding to it a layer of perfume called "sexiness".

Louise's hands nonchalantly touched her long slender legs beneath her cape.

Her fingers touched her toes, and returned to her knees.

Unknowingly, Louise made a seductive move: gently tugging the cape covering her body upwards, exposing her legs and slim yet sexy thighs. All this was done unconsciously.

Beneath the cape was her skin, a young maiden's skin now full of charm, due to her passion.

Which is to say, she was wearing nothing. Why? Because Louise only wore pajamas when she slept; so since she had forgotten to bring her pajamas, she had to replace it with a cape, and if she were wearing her underwear, she would not have been able to fall asleep.

Although the sexy and cute pose from Louise was spreading out an irresistible charm...It was a pity that the other person in the tent took no notice of it.

On the back of the cape covering Louise, was the lily emblem of Tristain. This cape was different from the one worn in the academy. The emblem, a way to distinguish friend from foe, clearly indicated that this area was a battleground.

As a female officer directly under Her Highness's command, Louise was assigned her own personal tent. In the military port of Rosais, buildings resembling hostels were rare, so tents were put at every stop. Such treatment was equal to a general's, but since Louise's legendary magic element ‘Void’ was considered to be a weapon of last resort, it was perfectly normal.

Inside the tent, illuminated by a magical lamp, was a simple bed made up of a piece of cloth covering some straw, a foldable dining table, a small cabinet for clothing and accessories and a bell for ordering the accompanying soldiers. In the battlefield, items like that inside a tent could be considered "luxurious".

In a corner of the tent, Saito was staring blankly in front of him, feeling low.

"Hey, Saito."

No reply.

Louise sat up, and called him again.

"Hey, I'm going to sleep soon. Come here, quickly."

Although Louise was red in the face as she called him, there was still no reaction.

"It's already past 10. We'll have to be up early tomorrow morning to inspect the frontlines. You'd better sleep now."

Even so, there was still no reply from Saito.

This familiar of Louise, who came from another world, was now sitting crossed-legged on the floor, his face full of depression. He was already like this since a week ago. When Louise recalled the battle which caused Saito's depression, she felt a dull pain in her heart.

A week ago, the combined armies of Tristain and Germania successfully occupied this port-town of Albion. As the main force of Albion's armies were lured to the northern port-town of Dartanes, there were only about 500 defenders in Rosais. The landing party, numbering 60,000, effortlessly destroyed the defenders and set up camp in Rosais.

By enticing the enemy, Louise's Void magic showed its power. The Void spell "Illusion", is a spell that can create huge illusions.

Louise used the 'Illusion' spell to create illusions of the combined armies landing in Dartanes, causing the enemy forces en route to Rosais to turn back.

But... in order for Louise and the others to reach Dartanes, some sacrifices had to be made. That was the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron, attached to "Varsenda", the flagship of the Albion expedition.

It was because of their engagament with enemy forces, that the Zero Fighter carrying Louise and Saito could successfully escape pursuit by the enemy's dragon knights.

The price for this battle's success... was the annihilation of the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron. Although dragon knights were very expensive, compared to the possible losses while landing in enemy territory, this sacrifice could be considered small. The commanding officer was even rewarded as a matter of fact! This too, was also something to be happy about.

The thing is, for those who took part in that battle, and witnessed the destruction

of the squadron for themselves, it was an entirely different feeling.

Louise observed Saito, and pouted her lips.

Of course, it was a sad thing that had happened, but…

During the landing battle, there were sacrifices as well. War definitely brings death along with it. If every death was mourned, there would be no end to it.

In Halkeginia, there were wars almost every single year.

For Louise, although death was something sad, it was also something very close to her.

Louise stood up. Under the dim glow of the magic lamp, the room was rather dark. Under such conditions, even if the cape didn't cover certain areas, her body should still remain unseen.

Louise crossed her hands in front of her, as if hugging herself, and held the hems of the cape tightly. She walked up to Saito, who was hugging his knees as he sat, and said, "Cheer up, alright."

"Emm," Saito grunted lifelessly.

"But, I can't help it. After all, it happened right before my eyes. Although it was for the success of the mission, still..."

Saito was really down in the doldrums. It was only then that Louise remembered: those teens were about Saito's age.

Saito… he must have projected himself onto them. This kind-hearted boy from another world, with what was going on in his mind a mystery, must have been hurt by this self-projection.

Just as how Saito had comforted her before, Louise felt that this time, it was her turn to comfort him. But, she didn't know how to go about doing it.

Louise squatted, and sat back-to-back with Saito.

"That... Although you may find me cruel for saying this... Compared to the deaths of the squadron, what makes me sadder is to see you being so depressed. Although I shouldn't be thinking like this, facts are facts. However, maybe because…you are my familiar and were by my side, I really felt very sad."

Saito slowly turned his head, and stared quietly at Louise.

"Death may sadden people... But that was a glorious death on the battlefield... for honor. They died for a great victory. They'd be pitiful if you felt sad about their deaths..."

"Do you mean what you say... regarding this?"

He felt that something was amiss when Louise started talking like this.

”Of course not, but it has to be this way. We're now at war."

Louise's right hand let go of the hem it was holding, and gently patted Saito's forehead, now that he has turned around. Her fingers caressed the streaks of dried tears on his cheeks.

Saito shook his head, and cried.

"I... I didn't even know their names."

Instead of calling it an unbearable pain, it was more of the inability to forgive.

To die for the mission, to die for honor.

He couldn't imagine these feelings at all.

Doesn't Louise understand this?

He recalled Colbert's letter. The teacher wrote: *Do not become accustomed to killing each other. Do not become accustomed to death.*

He was wondering at the time, "How is it possible that one could get used to such things?"

As Louise looked at Saito's forlorn face, she felt terrible. The things she had just said were not lies. Although she felt sad for those youths who had sacrificed

themselves, they had died for the victory of their country.

Louise, who had grown up receiving the education of the nobility, and Saito, who grew up in the peaceful Japan of Earth: there was an obvious rift between them.

Louise felt pain seeing Saito’s crying face. Compared to mourning the dead, she had a greater desire to heal the pain of the living. If Saito's tears were a kind of gentleness, then perhaps this can be said to be another type of gentleness.

Louise thought,

What should one do at a moment like this? How does one comfort a boy who had been hurt?

And...

If it was that maid, what would she do? She used just a little bit of her imagination.

She would... use the warmth of her body! It's all that commoner can come up with.

On this train of thought, she suddenly became angry.

That... that sort of thing... I can do that too!

Recalling that time where he pushed her to the floor, and kissed her a few times on the neck, Louise's face became red at once.

Since at that time he had gotten excited all of a sudden (That's how Louise saw it), Louise hadn't forgiven Saito for what he did, definitely not.

He said something about liking her; surely he said it with doing that sort of thing in mind. Once her mind was on this thought, a burst of anger erupted from within her. After that, she couldn't even forgive herself. Although she was affected by the mood at the time, she actually lowered the hand which had risen to slap him.

That means... that is to say...

But, in the back of her mind, Louise shook her head furiously.

That doesn't mean that I've accepted him.

Because he wanted to do it the hard way; he's doing it unconsciously. That's right! Unconsciously!

Although Louise didn't know what "unconsciously" actually meant, she hugged Saito tightly, her face crimson-red. Hugging a familiar is something which isn't supposed to be done, due to the difference in status between the two. Yes... letting him sit beside the dining table could be said to be a form of pity. But, hugging him like this wasn't pity.

Louise shook her head. She thought, "What am I doing?" The incredible thing was that her heartbeat was quickening. Her racing heartbeat seemed to be dissolving the cruel atmosphere of the battlefield.

Despite all this, Saito was still depressed.

Is it still not enough?

Is simply hugging him tightly not enough?

Hoping that he would pucker up didn't mean that she liked him or anything. However, if a familiar was like this, it would affect missions in the future.

Louise intended to try her best at imitating Siesta. She was trying hard, even putting aside her noblewoman's pride. Although she didn't have any other feelings for this familiar, she didn't want to lose in battle, no matter what. However, there was no movement in Saito's vision.

She remembered what she was wearing now. Underneath the cape was her skin.

No underwear.

Louise took a deep breath. It's only a tiny bit. If doing this could comfort Saito a little, isn't it worth a try?

No way Louise!

How can you show others your body when you're unmarried?

If you treat him like familiar, that's still alright. But what are you doing now?

If he sees it, there will be trouble!

You'll have to marry him, those are the rules.

I want to marry?

Marry who?

This familiar?

No way! Impossible! He's a commoner from another world!

Her brain began to fry, as if it was about to explode. Saito stared at Louise in her current predicament, his eyes emotionless.

Sob...now even Louise was feeling down, she really wanted to heal this wound of Saito's.

Does Saito really like me… To think about it, although he did say that he liked me… but that was to take advantage of me… But does my body have that kind of charm… Aaahhhh! This is frustrating!!

Louise grew more and more confused; her brain was really going to explode soon. Just as she was loosening her grip on her cape...

Just as the gentleness of the mourner, and the gentleness of the comforter for the living, were about to meet...

Whoosh!

A sudden gust of wind blew against the tent.

"What... what's going on?"

"What?!"

Saito and Louise shouted at the same time.

Looks like something just landed beside the tent.

On closer inspection, it was a wind dragon.

On its back, one could see the silhouettes of dragon knights.

"Ene... enemies! The enemy is here!"

Saito grabbed his sword hurriedly. At that moment, a man peered out from the dragon's back, and said to Saito in a soft voice, "Oh, you're..."

Upon seeing his face, Saito's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets; he was stunned.

"Aaahhh!"

The men sitting on the dragon were the dragon knights that had been thought decimated.

Saito's mouth fell wide open. He asked softly,

"H... How?"

"It's... a long story."

That was the reply from a plump dragon knight. The rest of the knights bowed their heads, as if embarrassed.

"We'll talk again later. So… so sorry to have interrupted the two of you…" The plump knight captain said shyly.

Louise, with only a cape covering her, was blankly leaning against Saito.

Louise hurriedly kicked Saito away, and screamed,

"W-w-we didn't do anything!"

Perhaps, it was the miracle caused by the temperature difference between the two types of gentleness.

The dragon knights, thought to be deceased, were standing before them, with not a single man missing.

Besides the dragon which they rode on, the knights lost the rest of their dragon mounts... But no matter, all the men returned safely.

Before Saito's and Louise's relief, they could hardly speak with their mouths now wide open

"You all... How..."

"No... Well... actually, we aren't sure ourselves."

Seeing the sudden return of the knights, the senior officers in the dragon knight's headquarters tent nearly had their eyes popping out of their sockets.

From the day they were annihilated, a week had passed.

Furthermore, this was enemy territory - the land of Albion. Their survival was already written off as hopeless.

Count Kirnumel, the commander of the 2nd Dragon Knight Group, in charge of three dragon knight squadrons, was the first to open his arms and welcome the return of these warriors, who had miraculously survived.

"Never mind! Regardless, returning alive is something worth being happy about! It really is incredible! A miraculous survival, I say!"

Immediately, applause and cheers rang out inside the tent.

Standing beside Saito and Louise, who brought the whole lot here, a young knight with a shy expression said in a loud, clear voice,

"Actually, even I find it hard to believe myself… even the wounds on our bodies were healed completely!"

A knight took a closer look at the survivors, and exclaimed,

"You're right!"

"Was it the enemy who treated you guys?"

"I... don't know. Regardless, I shall first narrate my personal experience of the battle."

As the leader, the young knight began narrating his report to those in the tent.

The 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron was surrounded by more than a hundred enemy riders... One by one, the riders fell to the enemy's magic attacks.

Almost every knight and dragon mount was severely wounded, and lost consciousness as they plummeted to the ground.

"So, what happened after you guys regained consciousness?"

"At the time, I was already riding on the dragon's back, along with the rest, all the way to Rosais. It's only upon reaching here did I realise that a week had already passed."

"You're saying that you guys have no memory of what happened from the moment you guys were shot down till today?"

The knights looked at each other sheepishly.

"Yes, sir. Absolutely nothing."

"Hey... Don't tell me you guys lost an entire week's memories?"

"That's exactly what happened."

The knights nodded in shame.

"That one remaining dragon mount... Who did it belong to?" Enquired one of the officers.

A knight raised his hand, saying, "It's my Beyael." He was one of the twins. Kirnumel focused his attention on the youth.

"What was the situation like at the time?"

"When we got surrounded, I was injured before my mount; my shoulder was hit by a magic missile. Beyael probably wanted to help me escape. So, it pretended to be hit, and flew to a lower altitude."

There was a tinge of shame in his voice, due to the fact that the other knights continued to fight on despite the injuries they and their dragon mounts suffered.

"Since you could no longer fight, it's only logical to leave the battlefield. There's nothing to be ashamed of."

Upon hearing those words from his commander, the lad brightened up immediately.

"Thank you."

Kirnumel touched his moustache. Of course, it's a joyous thing to have the knights back safe and sound... But, there were too many anomalies, and they were bound to raise suspicions.

Who was it that saved these gravely-wounded dragon knights, healed them, and allowed them to ride on the sole surviving wind dragon to Rosais?

The enemy would surely carry out a search to identify the riders who had been shot down. But, they escaped the search, and returned in one piece.

It could very well be a trap.

Kirnumel ordered the knights to stand in a line, and allowed his subordinates to use magic for a detailed check on these young survivors. He felt that the enemy could be using magic to manipulate them.

But, there were no problems with the results. The youths showed no traces of manipulation on them, and since there was nothing else to ask of them, Kirnumel urged them to retire.

"Since your dragon survived, you shall go under the command of the 1st Group. As for the rest, since you all are without dragons; that cannot be helped."

Kirnumel focused his attention on Louise, whom until now stood by the side blankly, as if she was an outsider. Although her true identity was unknown, his

superiors had mentioned that this female officer was sent by the Princess, and knows how to use some unknown but special magic.

Treat her with all due respect - that decree had already been sent from the highest HQ to the rest of the forces.

"Until the replacement dragons arrive, you all shall be Miss Vallière's guards. Dismissed!"

After leaving the Battalion HQ tent, the plump captain of the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron immediatly bowed to Saito.

"Now that we are under your command, please guide us along the way."

Saito used his hand to wipe his eyelids, as he hugged the captain.

"I thought you guys were dead."

"No... Come to think about it, I forgot something, so I can't possibly die that easily."

"Forgot something?"

Saito asked, a stunned expression on his face.

The plump knight smiled,

"I haven't introduced myself. I'm Rene Vonke, a dragon knight of Tristain. Nice to meet you."

Saito also introduced himself.

"I'm Hiraga Saito."

"That's a strange name you have there," Rene said, while laughing.

Saito, who looked as if he was about to cry, laughed and said, "Then, let us drink our fill tonight, to celebrate all of you returning safely!"

Saito and company went into Louise's tent, and the party began in there. Perhaps, the survivors were just glad to be alive, and drank and drank. And before long, they were drunk.

Before anyone knew it, the only two sober souls around were Saito and Rene.

Due to the wind dragon blowing against the tent a while back, the top had a gash on it. From the crack, one could see the stars and the moon. The cool night wind entered the tent. Saito shivered.

"But, I didn't expect you to get so depressed. No... sorry for letting you worry…" said Rene gravely.

"It's because of you guys that my familiar was feeling down the entire day. It was really, really bad!"

A while back, Louise chided them. Upon hearing Louise's words, they said, "What a strange fellow!" Then, everyone roared with laughter. Saito couldn't understand at all why they laughed.

Louise, after hollering for a good while, was now sleeping on Saito's knee, probably tired out from her shouting.

"Is it so weird for me to be depressed?"

Hearing Saito's words, Rene grinned,

"Wouldn't there be no end to it?"

"No end to it? What do you mean?"

Saito retorted with his own question. Rene drank a mouthful of grape wine straight from the bottle, his plump cheeks now red from the wine. He said solemnly,

"Are we not at war now? If you're going to grieve over every single stranger, wouldn't there be no end to it?"

"We're not strangers; I talked with you guys before. If someone died while protecting you, you would definitely feel sad! You guys are the ones with strange ideas!"

Saito downed a mouthful of wine. Rene, with a somewhat serious look, said,

"We didn't serve as bait in order to protect you two. We were protecting the battle plan, and our own honor."

"What do you mean?"

"Back then, the orders we received were to escort you guys to Dartanes at all cost. Ensuring the success of this battle would mean the protection of the entire royal army, equivalent to a blood oath of loyalty to Her Highness. As long as our loyalty to Her Highness is recognized, the prestige of our clans will increase. Even if I die, the glory will continue on."

"This is crazy."

"Hey, don't spout nonsense like that! Maybe you're a commoner. That's why you're not aware of this, but to nobility, the so-called "honor" is something which is more important than life itself."

"Geez. Thankfully, I'm not some nobleman."

"Exactly. Compared to being born into petty nobility, it's much more comfortable being a commoner!"

"Petty nobility?"

"That's right. Unlike those counts and earls, for each generation we have to survive on a pitifully small salary. No wealth means no fancy decor, and no pride. If we want to escape that, the only way is to work hard in the battlefield, and gain the recognition of our superiors. If one's achievements in the war are recognized, he'll be granted a fiefdom as a reward. So, everyone rabidly puts his life on the line. They have no time to worry about the danger of death. Huu..."

Saito closed his eyes and thought for a while.

"But, if you die, wouldn't it be all over? Why do you noblemen drop terms like

'death' and 'honor' so casually? Are you guys idiots?"

No answer. After a closer look, it turns out that Rene had already fallen asleep.

"Guluuu..."

"What the... He fell asleep after saying his piece."

Really, these so-called "nobility" are a bunch of stubborn fellows. Louise is also like that. She said herself that "I'll definitely help you find a way to get home." But, once the war began, her attention became entirely focused on it.

He actually followed Louise all the way to this; was he out of his mind?

...For what am I fighting like this, even putting my life on the line?

A few reasons popped up in his mind.

He wanted to lend a hand to the pitiful Henrietta.

He wanted to protect Siesta's hometown, for the girl had always cared for him.

But, the most important reason of all... is that he was worried about Louise.

That's probably it... he thought, as he looked at this young lady with peach-coloured hair, who was sleeping on his knee. To put it plainly, it was because he loved her. That was why he always worried.

Louise is really cute, and he really wanted to feel her. But, he would have to hold back for now, as everyone was here.

Ah, but would his feelings be reciprocated?

Whether this relationship would have an outcome, perhaps only God himself knows. The God of Earth... or the gods of this different world... who should he ask for the answer?

Thinking about this, Saito immediately shook his head.

Am I an idiot... Why am I thinking about such silly questions?

It was then that he recalled what Louise had said just now.

Death may sadden people.... But that was a glorious death in the battlefield... for honor. They died for a great victory. They'd be pitiful if you felt sad about their deaths...

He had a very strong distaste for this. It felt unnatural.

At the same time, he felt that Louise, who was sleeping on his lap, was getting further and further away from him. *She's just in front of me...why do I have this feeling?!* He couldn’t fathom the reason for it at all.

Huu... Let's sleep... thought Saito, allowing Louise to continue using his leg as a pillow as he lay down to sleep.

All the while, the bright moonlight from the two moons beamed down upon him, as if to comfort him and his many troubles...

Chapter Two: Fairy

It was the third day after the miraculous return of the dragon knights. Rene and Saito, along with the rest, were partying in their tent all this while.

Ever since that party, Rene and the other members of the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron had been making fools of themselves at Louise's tent everyday. Being so-called "guards" was merely an excuse; in reality, they were there for other reasons.

"Cheers! To our miraculous survival!"

Saito lifted the 17th toast of the day, delivered in a half-drunken stupor.

"Cheers! Cheers!"

Slurry voiced dragon knight’s cacophonous chorus joined in. Again, the lot emptied their cups, filled to the brim with grape wine, in one gulp.

"It's great to be alive. You can still drink like this!"

Said Rene's deputy, a crimson-haired youth named Matthew Pennterdon, as he casually waved his wand, creating a mini whirlwind to stir the wine. As the third son of a petty noble family, he always drank in a miserly manner - diluting the wine with water before drinking it. So, he would occasionally use magic in this manner to stir his cup.

That pair of attention-grabbing twin dragon knights, were called Gilbert and Siegfried. With soft, pale golden hair and cute maiden-like faces, these two came from a noble family which had fallen into ill times. They helped each other to fill up the cups with wine, while grinning away.

Besides Louise, the rest were already dead drunk. No.... one of them seemed to have some sort of trouble, and was in deep thought, the somewhat taciturn

Fernand. When Saito toasted him, he merely shook his head. He appeared to be worrying about something.

At this point, the plump Rene showed up, hugging a sack full of stuff.

"Captain of the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron, Rene Vonke, has returned!"

"Hat's off. It's been hard on you."

Saito, who was sitting in the center seat, burst into laughter, the with dragon knight’s following him.

Sitting in the nook of the tent and hugging her knees, Louise could only watch the spectacle in frustration.

What is it with this bunch?

Simply put, they were treating the place as if it was their room. They were pretending to guard but coming here just to drink, away from the prying eyes of senior officers. Here they could do whatever they wanted.

Louise bit her lip in hatred. Of course, it wasn't easy for them to escape death, a little wine for celebration would still be tolerable.

But...

They were doing this every day! EVERY SINGLE DAY! And it was from dawn to dusk!

And these fellows have absolutely no idea on how to keep a room clean! Louise's grinding of her teeth became very audible. Bottles, bones of fowl and leftover scraps were scattered everywhere; the sight of it all was unbearable.

Whenever she complained, she got a chirpy "Okayyyyy!" in reply, but that was all. No one cleaned up the mess. As a result, the rubbish grew by the day, along with Louise's frustration.

Saito was the most unforgivable one. Initially, she thought that he'd warn them on Louise's behalf. Instead, that idiot began leading the racket, and was now the

"High Commander." "An absolute general of fools, how fitting for him," thought Louise, as she sighed.

"Status report!" said Saito, who really thought that he had become a general. Rene noisily opened the sack.

"Smoked ham, dried meats, sausages... and wine!"

Upon seeing all the food that was handily "requisitioned" from the warehouse; everyone cheered at once.

"Now, I shall decorate this officer with a medal..."

But, he had no medals with him. Just as Saito was being troubled by this, someone stuffed something into his hand. It was a light, pure white piece of fabric.

"Wha-what is this?"

Having figured out what that "something" really was, Louise hastily rose to her feet.

"Hey! That's my underwear! What are you guys thinking?!"

"Ah, because it was left there," said Matthew, who was the one who passed it to Saito.

"There... there's plenty over here," hollered the trembling Gilbert and Siegfried, as they opened Louise's wardrobe.

"This's the best medal ever!" One by one, the knights laughed.

“Lowest! You truly are the lowest!”

Blushing Louise hit Gilbert’s head and Siegfried’s chest with the wine bottle, threw a poultry bone at the rolling Rene, and all other drunken dragon knights were kicked and hit.

Lastly, she kicked a flustered Saito in the groin, and sat riding on his neck.

“Constantly making noise! Habit of a familiar! That’s the status of the familiar!

A D-d-dog's status! A Dog's! Just like a dog's status!”

Her voice squeaked each time she said "status". She was losing her reason.

“It can’t be; so you are her familiar!” Rene and others watched Louise’s and Saito’s flustered faces and started laughing loudly again.

“A Person being a familiar, what a weird story!”

Rene and others summoned “Pon!” And many familiars jumped into the tent. Because they were Wind mages, most of their familiars were winged… An owl, a falcon, a flying fox… a small griffon and a hippogriffon, even a phantom beast’s figure could be seen.

“These are familiars! Aahahaha!”

“Don’t think I l-love this guy or anything! This idiot came on his own!”

“Well, Summon Servant doesn't let you choose the partner!”

Rene, while laughing, approached Louise and said.

“However, you, Miss Vallière, summoned a boyfriend. The familiar and the lover in one, that might be ideal for a mage!”

The dragon knights burst out laughing.

“He is not my lover! Idiot! All idiots! Why can’t you understand?!”

Then Matthew said grinning.

“How about the other day, hmm?”

“You were very naked under the mantle! What about that?!”

Even Louise's neck crimsoned.

“Ribaldry! Lowest! Boys of your age shouldn’t have thoughts like this!”

At last, Louise grabbed the blanket and put it over her head.

Even after calming down, she wouldn't come out, instead pretending to sleep.

“Spicy. I wonder why she is so angry?”

Rene muttered anxiously. After that, they all simultaneously looked for Saito's reaction.

And Saito… had a worried frown on his face.

Where do we stand?

What is our relationship now?

Familiar and master, however, it seemed that their relationship progressed…

But did it really progress?

However, that time in the boat, they became close when he called for Louise. *But what does Louise really think of me?*

He felt uneasy.

“We didn’t mean any harm, sorry buddy.”

“A, aah” With mixed feelings, Saito nodded.

Rene and others exchanged looks.

“Ribaldry has been said.”

“It can't be helped. We are lower class nobles.” Matthew said.

“It happens to peerage as well! But Miss Vallière called it ribaldry and was annoyed! Aahahaha!” Siegfried and Gilbert laughed into each others' faces.

Indeed, thought Saito. Children in the Academy of Magic were all young nobles and ladies. They were all from high-status families like Louise’s, and even though Guiche’s and Montmorency’s families had financial problems, Guiche’s father was still a field marshal, and a field marshal is well respected within the military, right?

Louise and the others studied in a private, prestigious school which was very different from the public schools.

Aah, so that's why I felt so close to these guy's from the beginning, Saito thought.

Then he recalled Rene's words.

He said, that you can only advance in rank on the battlefield. Feeling sympathy, Saito sobered in a moment.

“Ha, drinking certainly makes me happy, after a great deed!"

Said Rene.

“That’s right! Even wingless, the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron will show how great they are!”

“Aahaha” Gilbert and Siegfried neighed.

“Aaah, when will we finally attack Albion’s army in Londinium? It has been ten days since we landed!”

Matthew said impatiently.

That’s right. There were no marching orders from the allied forces. Seems like they were waiting for an Albion army to come to Rosais where they could repulse them… But Albion's army didn’t seem to move either.

At that time… the dragon knight's wish seemed to come true, as a single child soldier came to the tent.

“Haah, an order from the dragon knight battalion headquarters.”

The boy seemed to be thirteen years old. He had a frightened look on his face seeing vulgar senior nobles with a mess all around.

“Battalion headquarters? What good are dragon knights without dragons?"

Rene sarcastically asked.

“I do not know. I am just reporting orders…”

What duties could they be given? Gilbert grumbled, and everyone, now with a serious look, started cleaning up after themselves.

But… unfortunately for the dragon knights, it was not about getting a chance to prove themselves. Rene, who ran into the tent with his sword ready, after seeing the yawning Earl Ginnumer, lost any kind of expectations.

“Forget about the report. For now, please tell the story of your returning alive.”

Saito and Louise also came. Mostly because they could not leave without their "guards".

Rene, in a not very motivated voice, began the report. Most of it was the same as the time he spoke the other day.

They were shot, they fell… one week later, they all awoke on the dragon’s back. That’s it.

It was certainly a mysterious story. However, during wars in magic-using Halkeginia, unexpected things happened a lot. Because of war, no one really cared about it.

However, Louise quietly listened to that story. It seemed that it had caught her interest.

Then, when it came to an end...

A single boy started speaking hesitantly.

It was obedient Fernand. After making a thoughtful face, he said,

“T-that…”

“What's wrong Fernand, do you want to go to the bathroom?”

Matthew teased. Making the boy flustered.

“T-that’s not it! I have something to report! Stop making fun of me!”

Because the always obedient Fernand had a serious look on his face everyone fell silent.

“W-well… I cannot say for sure if it was illusion or reality the other day… but when I calmly think about it, but that…”

“What’s the matter? Give a brief report,” ordered Ginnumer.

“Ye-yes! The report! When I crashed, I was thrown off the back of the dragon… and laid on the ground for a while. Not moving anything… my body was paralytic. Ha ha, I thought I was about to die… But then, I saw.”

Ginnumer, seemed not to be in a mood for this, and urged him on.

“What?”

The boy, in doubt for a moment wether or not to say it, muttered hesitatingly,

“It was a fairy.”

“What kind of fairy? Water? Then it was a spirit.”

“It’s different! It was not that flabby! It was… more beautiful! A Fairy of the Wind!”

“'Fairies of the Wind' do not exist. Fairies, unlike the spirits of the dead, are legendary living beings.”

“I do not understand myself! But, I know it was a fairy…”

“How did it look like?”

“Very beautiful… a girl. With beautiful blond hair… her body shone. No doubt, it was a fairy! An ancient fairy!”

Everyone scorned Fernand's words.

Then.

“Beautiful blond hair, like mine?”

A clear voice said. The voice sounded so sweet that at first it was hard to tell if it belonged to a man or woman.

A tall, blond boy entered the tent. Saito’s and Louise’s eyes were drawn at once to that beautiful boy. The 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron made unpleasant faces.

“What do you want to say about your blond hair, Romalian?”

“Please remember my name first – Julio Cesar.”

The name seemed manly. A handsome dragon knight, who introduced himself as Julio, after gracefully bowing to Ginnumer, reported.

“The 3rd Dragon Knight Squadron, returned from the patrol flight.”

Ginnumer nodded with a smile.

“Was the first unit successful?”

“Yes.”

“Well then, get some rest.”

“Certainly.”

The knight made a soft bow.

Julio looked around the tent. This reminded Saito of the similar antipathy he felt towards Wardes when they first met. *Huuh?* he really did not like this fellow.

Well anyway, it was not surprising. Though Guiche was lady-killer, he was different. Was he a woman? He looked like one, with those thin and slender, appealing lips. Long eyelashes that created a beautiful shadow. While listlessly rolling hair around his thin finger covered with white gloves, he looked around the tent.

Seeing Saito, in surprise he stopped playing with his hair.

Though the left eye of the boy who introduced himself as Julio was the same

color as Louise’s… the right eye that had been mostly hidden by his hair was crystal blue. In other words - the colors of his right and left eyes were different.

He smiled at Saito.

“Is it so weird that the color of my eyes are different?”

“N-no…” he blushed instinctively. What was that, he is a man, Saito tried to persuade himself.

“Then don’t feel so shy looking at it.”

He said not bashfully at all. In fact, he was smiling and grinning, seemingly enjoying Saito's reaction. *Foxy guy,* Saito thought.

“Speaking of abnormalities. You are the rumored familiar Saiton, right?"

“It's Saito.”

In a hoity-toity gesture he waved it away and introduced himself by bowing gracefully.

“Sorry! I was being rude! I am a priest of Romalia, Julio Cesar. I was looking forward to meeting you… Because a human being for a familiar is very rare. I wanted to meet you at least once… Ah, and you…”

Noticing Louise, Julio took off his cool mask, and gave a wide smile. It was an innocent smile, just like a bloomed flower.

“And you are Miss Vallière? As rumored! You are very beautiful!”

Louise’s mouth opened, while he took her hand and placed it at his lips.

Saito trembled.

Just whose hand do you think you're kissing? Get away, she's mine. My master.

Saito tried to calm himself down. *Louise, having a mouth pressed to her hand so suddenly, won’t let it slide. A kick will fly, a punch will fly, and a lot of blood will gush out.* Saito stared in anticipation… but nothing flew at all.

Instead.

“You shouldn’t.” She cast her eyes down, with a blush on her cheeks, and said shyly.

Saito was in a cold sweat.

What’s with that reaction?

He was reminded of Wardes. He remembered that Louise was weak against such charm. Saito felt like throwing up.

“It is inexcusable! To discover such beauty outside Romalia, in the middle of the war! I was born just to meet such beauty! Marvelous!”

He was talking rubbish like Guiche. Saito’s shoulders trembled. He was also angry at Louise for not taking offense at this rascal’s actions.

“Are priests allowed to touch women like that? Is it common between Romalian people…”

Instead of Saito, it was Matthew who said it with a scowl. It seemed that Julio wasn’t very popular among the members of the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron.

“Since I was going into the war, I received a temporary secular life permission from the pope.”

“That’s sophistry.”

“I would call it expedience. A priest's privilege. However, what you said is true. Miss, I am sorry. My body was not contained by my priesthood, and reacted on

its own after seeing a charming woman.”

Reverting back to joking tone, he teasingly smiled and bowed to Louise.

“But… though leading our way God is a great being, he sometimes mercifully closes his eyes. I am looking forward to seeing you every day.”

Fruity like a fool.

However… the way he acts. Though Guiche is a lady-killer and fruity, he tries to escape the relationship. However, this fellow didn't have such a gap. Compared to Wardes, who felt cold somehow, this fellow was strangely friendly. Saito understood it by instinct.

This guy was a real flirt.

Without weaknesses either.

Then Julio put on a serious face again. Such a sudden change of mood, only made him feel more hateful towards the man. Saito chewed on his handkerchief in anger.

“The story before. Were you telling the truth about that fairy?”

Fernand nodded.

“Y-yeah.”

“Can you show where you were shot down?”

Julio pointed at the map of the Albion continent spread on the table and asked.

Rene answered.

“Certainly… about one hour of flight from the continent border…”

He pointed at the corner of the map.

Interested, Julio nodded.

“Hmm, near Saxe-Gotha.”

At that time, Ginnumer coughed.

“Maybe it’s time for you to take care of your dragon.”

Julio spread his hands out, “I envy those who do not have to take care of a dragon,” and after leaving this sarcastic message, he left. Everyone from the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron, who lost their dragons in battle, watched Julio’s back in hatred.

“Who is that fruity rascal?”

When Saito, who left the dragon knight battalion headquarters, asked, Rene frowned.

“He is a priest from Romalia. Priests pretending to be dragon knights… disgusting.”

“Romalia?”

Dumbfounded Saito asked.

“You don’t know Romalia?”

Rene asked, surprised. Saito shook his head. Saito who was not from this world, was not aware about the countries and local places. However, because telling that he was from different world would be very troublesome, he came up with an excuse.

“I am from the east… From Rub' al Khali.”

“Hee! So you come from the land that always quarrels with elves!”

“Have you passed the ground where elves live?!” He was surprised. Apparently, in this world, elves are frightening and seemed to be a belligerent race. Moreover, they were on bad terms with humans.

“Romalia is a ‘religious authority’ country, that manages temples in Halkeginia.

It is a country where there are a lot of priests, who are domineering, even more than nobles.”

“Romalia’s priests, because of their status as servants of God, can travel abroad freely.”

Though they were nobles, their attitude was just as haughty.

“Can priests conjure too?”

“Sure!” one noble shouted.

“If he is born in a noble's house, where the magic is practiced, then he still caries the same blood even turning into priest… In case he is a commoner, naturally, he cannot use magic.”

“Julio comes from commoners,” someone said.

Ahh, he was not a mage.

“Then why is a guy like him riding a dragon? And on top of that is a Squadron Commander!”

“Aah, for a commoner he is abnormally good at riding dragons.”

“It’s really mortifying” one muttered.

“It is said that even though he is not a mage, dragons listen to him. I do not know if it’s true though.”

“Because of that he became Earl’s Ginnumer’s favorite, and was made into Commander of the 3rd Squadron. Since the 3rd Squadron is a foreign legion, it is an unprecedented career! Because a priest became Dragon Knight Commander, the dragon knights became a laughing stock of the other troops!”

Saito continued the talk, but was stopped by an officer with a wand who entered the tent.

“Hey, hey! Do not sit around and talk in here! It's a nuisance! A nuisance!”

Saito and others looked at each other.

“Let’s return to Miss Vallière’s tent. That’s where our place is.”

Then, remembering Louise, Saito turned around.

Louise stood there alone *Haaaah* with a dreamy expression on her face.

Saito became suspicious.

Why is Louise making such a face?

Then he remembered.

Uh! Could it be because of Julio?

By that handsome dragon knight?

No, that priest?

Eeeh, whatever you call him!

Anyway, since awhile ago, that blush hasn't left her face…

Saito began to burn with jealousy.

She is making such face just because her hand was kissed! What a woman. Unfaithful! Unfaithful! Though not being her lover himself, Saito cursed.

This is certainly "wrong". Just because she was complimented by that beautiful face!

What about my love confession?

No… Why? *He thought for a moment…*

Something flashed in Saito's head.

He recalled the last party with Rene and others. "Louise and I, what relationship do we have now?" and his doubt increased.

Before, at Louise's home, she talked about "rewarding loyalty" even though I confessed.

Then… if you think about it…

The war has started now and we were in haste, and I was depressed in a room, thinking that everyone died…

When he thought about it very well…

Maybe this is rejection?

I thought I was favored or kind of accepted… but when you think about it… is it an acceptance?

Loyalty reward. That's what it was.

In other words…

He was rejected.

Saito felt like he was hit by a hammer. He kneeled down on one knee and shook his head. Rene, seeing Saito in such a state, asked uneasily.

"H-hey… Saito?"

However, others' words failed to reach Saito.

He was completely lost in his own world.

Then came despair and anger.

Be damned 100 times for being so cute.

Aaah, for this woman's wishes I went into a war that I did not want.

What was I trying so hard and risking my life for?

Cuuurse you.

Guilty! Cuuuuuuurse you!

Anger towards Louise whirled violently. Like lava that gushed out of the volcano it washed away the sensible man in him.

Hiraga’s private trial was opened and the decision was given in two seconds.

Defendant – Queen’s attorney, court lady Louise Françoise Le Blanc de La Vallière.

Presiding Judge – me.

Ahhn, guilty! Guilty! Go to circumstances consideration room!

Presiding Judge's word.

Following society regalement this man here said ‘I like you♪ Lets start by being friends♪” but the answer was…

T! H! I! S!

"Loyalty reward"

"You may touch only one place you like the most."

You are not allowed to touch the master in public.

My dog. Not a dog. Ah, still a dog.

But yet you say a dog. And then not a dog.

Then, he recalled the other day in the Louise‘s tent.

He thought Rene was dead and was sad, he dully was not even able to understand, that she was only wearing a mantle on her naked body. *T-this woman is an idiot! Can’t she understand the feelings of a man?*

Presiding Judge Hiraga, based on Article 3 of Love Between Man and Woman, gives a verdict to the defendant.

Verdict – ignore.

Starting from now.

Saito began to walk away, ignoring Louise.

After leaving the dragon knights' headquarters tent, the story and the beautiful boy made Louise's mind confused.

Somehow she felt uneasy.

When she saw him, she felt a strange uneasiness.

Was she startled because it was a beautiful boy?

Somewhat. Louise was a girl going through puberty and she did not hate beautiful boys. But to put it simply she did not think of him as a lover. Only one boy occupied her thoughts at the moment, even though she wasn't fully aware of it, other boys, even those with a "nice face," failed to move her thoughts.

The tenant though was constantly making the landlord angry.

This uneasiness was part of the natural appeal.

And this uneasiness was not only because of that.

It was the "fairy" that one of the dragon knights witnessed. Though it would be easy to laugh it off as a dream… they all actually lost their memories for one week. Their carefree attitude of not worrying about anything after returning alive annoyed Louise.

But that was because they are soldiers, she thought, they cannot think about every little thing in the middle of the war.

While thinking about the true colors of her uneasiness… Louise came back to herself.

Hey-hey, where is Saito's going?

Louise was ignored.

The dragon knight boys were laughing a weird laugh, and were starting to drink alcohol again, ignoring Louise. *That idiot, just now, why was he laughing so*

unnaturally?

Was he trying to ignore me as joke?

And to discuss things while drinking again?

What-what! Don't joke around.

"Hey, wait!"

But Saito did not turn to her call. Did he not hear? This time she shouted.

"Saito! Wait! Escort your master to the tent properly~!"

However, he continued to ignore her.

Heh? What?! What is this?!

Saito didn't even turn around. *The distance can't be too big. He should have… heard me.*

Louise started to boil with anger towards Saito. Such behavior by her partner (sealed with Louise) made the pink-blonde girl's temper explode.

One couldn't blame Louise's short temper. When you are in love with someone, even the smallest things can be damaging and easily make one happy or angry.

Though Louise wasn't aware of her love, it was 100% pointing at Saito. Thus even his slightest action could easily make her angry.

Hey! I haven't even offended this guy! And yet I am ignored!

Stop ignoring my words!

Clenching her hands into fists, Louse kicked a stone on the road away.

Noticing the raging Louise, Rene turned to Saito and whispered,

“Isn’t she your master? Are you angry at her? Why do you ignore her?”

Saito looked at Louise.

Louise was angry. She was raging on the road.

Angry at being ignored by her familiar. That’s understandable. I am just a familiar anyway. Yes yes.

Aaah, that’s right. Its impossible for a noble to fall in love with a humble familiar.

Saito almost cried, while thinking so.

He wanted to cry bitterly, leaving Rene to comfort him.

But… Saito choked the tears down.

What kind of girl do you think Louise is? She's a noble girl.

You have to be gentle.

Saito clasped fists and looked up at the night sky.

The star was blinking… beautiful.

And two moons shone… like in a dream.

Aaah, moon-star, please wash away this ugly jealousy of mine.

Yes. I am a man right?

I should ignore in anger… after all.

Then, Saito, thinking so, gave a cramped smile.

I am an honorable man, he tried to persuade himself while trembling.

He thought, already beaten with a cold sweat.

But when he turned with concession to say “…ah, Louise come over”…

surprisingly!

Louise looked the other way.

“Come over here, okay.”

With her arms crossed and puffing her cheeks, she turned away.

Wh-what’s this!?

Disgusting. Even now this woman was treating him coldly.

But this time, it wasn’t Louise’s usual angry attitude.

But… this time Louise’s face looked uncomfortable.

Is this all that Louise thinks of me? Uncomfortable.

Louise's attitude was over-reacting.

Saito turned around and began to walk away quickly.

“Hey, what is this? You must be joking.”

Rene looked anxiously between Saito and Louise… and then, ran after Saito.

Louise, left behind, trembled with anger.

She bellowed towards the direction where Saito had left.

“What was that?! Come over here!”

And waited for a while. But... he was not coming back.

Wha-w-w-what a selfish thing!

Louise was really pissed off.

Even though I feel insecure in the middle of the war…

I am being exploited… And what kind of compassion do I get?

Saito seemed completely not in the mood to explain anything.

Steadily, her eyes grew teary. Lately she just wanted to escape it all.

Separately, well, that's ok. Bad, but it's ok. I'll forgive him. That boy is like that, it cannot be helped. I don't like him, really, I don't like, aah, maybe a little.

Louise shook her head.

Don't think. No good. Absolutely no good.

Honestly, well, he said he likes me, she thought.

However, what is this "love". Is it true?

But if it's love why he does treat me so coldly? She could not understand.

Besides, he should not be hanging around with that maid.

Really he must be saying that to all girls. Idiot. Not just to the maid.

He said 'love' to me as well.

It was inexcusable. He's a liar. I hate him. I hate him.

"That's enough" Louise muttered while biting her lips.

Chapter Three: The Priest of Romalia

The Tristain and Germania united army landed in the port-town Rosais, which was located about 300 leagues south of Albion's capital Londonium.

Upon landing, the allied forces expected an enemy counterattack. First of all, land units formed a circle around Rosais.

Yet… Albion made no counterattack.

The Supreme Commander of the united army, De Poitiers, lost the momentum to invade. Their strategy assumed the enemy would attack after the landing. The "decisive battle" was to happen near Rosais, where it would let them destroy the enemy’s large army in one blow and march to Londonium unopposed.

They planned for the campaign to finish in three weeks, when Yara’s month would begin… essentially, before Founder Brimir's Advent Festival, or "New Year's Day".

In other words, they had prepared for a quick, decisive battle.

This strategic failure could not be helped now. A large amount of food would be necessary to maintain a large army of 60,000 people. To recite strong spells, specific medicine (especially Water element-based healing medicine) would be needed, along with war materials like bullets, gunpowder and cannons. And it all had to be carried from their own country to the army in the front.

Fighting a long war in the enemy's territory would be nothing but a nightmare. Besides, Tristain’s economy made such a long war impossible.

Albion's main army successfully retreated from Dartanes, and barricaded itself in the capital city of Londinium.

The enemy army avoided fighting a decisive battle; after Albion's air force received damage beyond imagination, and lost control of the sky, the Albion army seemed to have abandoned counterattack tactics.

The allied forces were prepared for Albion’s attack.

But because expectations went down the drain and physical damage did not occur, constructing positions and preparing for a decisive battle became pointless. The allied forces wasted food for a week and a half.

The allied forces could not plan anything but a quick decisive battle, so they only brought enough food supply for six weeks. But now it became necessary to carry food and gunpowder from their own country by ship. For the two countries that organized the expedition army with very limited finances, the situation was worrisome.

By the eighth day after the landing, a tense atmosphere surrounded the future invasion plans.

The air base in Rosais began as the Royal Albion Air Headquarters before turning into the Sacred Albion Republic Air Force Headquarters, and had finally become the Tristain-Germania United Martial Army Command Base. These walls of red brick had changed masters three times in one year. A great hall on the second floor was where history was made.

The Supreme Commander of coalition forces, General de Poitiers, sat at the round table on the central seat. He listened to two opposing opinions.

The first one came from Germanian General Marquis Handenburg, who insisted, while shaking his fist and white mustache, upon a quick, decisive battle.

“Let’s march! March! March! We have food only for four and a half weeks. Make a detour at a fort on the way and march straight to the castle! Anyway, let's aim for Londonium. Fortunately, we control the sky. We have to end the war before Founder Brimir's Advent Festival, for morale will drop after advent festival!

It seemed like Germania’s General insisted upon advancing like a flame.

“Ending before the Advent Festival is fine, but I wonder why there are no such

short war stories in Halkeginia’s history?”

Wimpffen, the Chief of Staff, objected, coldly staring through the frames of his glasses.

“Then, we'll be the first,” Marquis Handenburg said and gave a piercing glare to Wimpffen.

“By circling Londinium, we would expose our back to their castles… We can’t act without strategy. Moreover, if we start marching, the supply lines would be left behind. Without supplies we would end up in a deadlock. Although it is troublesome, we should proceed carefully, step-by-step. We should advance by capturing fortresses and castles along the way.”

“Capturing fortresses and castles would inflict too much damage! Supplies? We only have to take over Londonium before Advent Festival!”

“As the Marquis said, we control the sky, right? So the damage upon capturing will be kept to minimum. Londonium taken over by the Advent Festival? That’s nonsense!”

Marquis Handenburg exclaimed with a face full of contempt,

“…this is Wind-element thinking, wind that evades obstacles in its cowardice.”

“As if Fire-element thinking, which hastily burns itself out, is any better.”

The two men glared at each other.

“Courage is what cowardly Tristains need to be taught.”

“There’s nothing to learn from barbarians.”

They both pulled their wands out at the same time. Supreme General de Poitiers stepped in between them.

“We argue too much! Marquis! Marquis! Show Germanian courage in the battlefield! Wimpffen! Stop disgracing yourself!”

At last, they both calmed down.

“For now we have to admit that the first plan, beating Albion's main forces and then advancing to Londinium, getting Cromwell’s head, and raising the White Lily flag in Whitehall, failed. but completing the war according to plan is still possible.”

After overthrowing the Albion's revolution government, they would rule in the name of Henrietta. Of course, part of the territory would be ceded to Germania. Afterwards, the remaining survivors of Albion's royal family would be searched for and placed on the throne of the territory under Tristain’s rule, thus reviving the monarchy. To avoid possible revolutions they decided to look for Albion’s surviving royal family members, once a suitable noble with royal blood was found, the throne would be passed to him.

De Poitiers shook his head, trying to brush off these thoughts.

It was not the time to think about it. Right now they needed to think about how to annihilate the enemy.

De Poitiers bit his lip. *My promotion depends on this.*

If he could win this war, he would be promoted to Field Marshal.

Everything could have been easily settled by one decisive battle… De Poitiers felt a grudge against the Albion army. *Why would Cromwell barricade himself in Londinium?*

What about the enemy occupying the country?

What about facing ministers, nobles and the public's opinion?

What is he counting on?

Momentarily lost in thought, he noticed the allied General and his Chief of Staff looking worriedly at him and announced their new strategy himself.

“…there is no decisive battle anymore, but the plan must be executed anyway. We have to take over Londinium and the Emperor's palace, Havilland, and raise Her Majesty‘s flag there. Now, it would be too dangerous to attack Londinium directly. And capturing castle after castle could take decades.”

The Marquis and Chief of Staff nodded and frowned. De Poitiers showed the map that had been laid out on the table and pointed at the place between Rosais and Londonium.

“The City of Saxe-Gotha. It is an ancient town an favorite tourist spot. We will take it over and turn it into the foothold for the capture of Londinium. We will leave 5,000 soldiers here in Rosais to secure the supply lines and path for retreat. The remaining troops will participate in the capture with the support from our air forces. If the enemy's main army comes out, we will finish it with a decisive battle, of course.”

The Marquis and Chief of Staff nodded. The proposal was a compromise, and though it was a noncommittal strategy, it wasn’t bad.

Saxe-Gotha was a big town. The crossing of all roads. If it were taken, it would possibly be effective against other castles and towns. Even if the war was not settled before the Advent Festival, it would be easy to hold out longer as it was a big city.

As they debated the strategy, someone knocked at the door.

“Who?” asked a guard.

“It is me. It is Her Majesty's Court Lady, La Vallière.”

De Poitiers signaled the guards to let her in, even though he wasn’t particularly eager to let the girl take part in army business. Although he couldn’t treat her unkindly as she was Her Majesty’s Court Lady and the user of the legendary Void, she still might be bothersome.

De Poiters saw Louise as nothing more than a "tool".

“Aah, Miss Void. We have prepared a gorgeous tent for you. Leave all the trouble to servicemen and take a rest. I will call you if you are needed.”

Louise was nervous about the great surroundings. However, she couldn‘t do what she decided to if she acted cowardly. So, she gathered her courage and spoke up,

“W-well…”

“What? Oh, you were not rewarded for your work at Dartanes. As expected of Void. You did well. Gentlemen! Applause!”

Indifferent applause echoed in the conference room.

“I will request the royal family for a reward.”

“N-no that…”

“What? Are you still here?”

De Poiters tone became diluted with dour.

Is a single reward not enough? What a greedy girl!

Human beings are greedy, it is one of the basic habits of human beings. De Poitiers felt offended that after praising her, Louise wanted more.

“It's not that. Umm, I did not come here to get a reward. It’s about the dragon knights who returned alive…”

The generals for a moment could not understand what she was talking about… But then they remembered the dragon knight unit that had returned alive and nodded.

“Aah, what about it?”

“Well… it’s great, but don’t you think it’s strange? A whole week passes after the crash and they return safe and sound, and all the while they don't remember anything in between?”

“Indeed.”

The annoyed generals listened to her. How was it effecting the army? They were about to say it.

“It’s a place near Saxe-Gotha. I think it should be investigated.”

When Louise said that, the General waved his hand.

“Oh, Okay. Near the marching route. A search expedition will be organized to

investigate the mystery," he said in a dull tone not really supporting such an expedition.

“Did they hit their heads and see some kind of ghost?”

“…they reported it was a fairy.”

“A kind fairy!”

Someone said; the conference room was wrapped up in laughter. It did not matter whom she asked. The ten surviving knights were just another war miracle and they would not explore it even if the knights minds were clear.

“No way! What if behind it lies an important secret?! Something that might change the course of the war!”

“Miss, though it certainly is a mysterious event, it is not likely that it would change such a grand situation. We do not have time to care about such trivial matters.”

“But…”

Then, as if just having an idea, De Poitiers added.

“Right, I want you to go to investigate it. Can you do that?“

Louise left the red-brick command center as if being driven out. Saito and Rene, who were waiting at the entrance of the building, ran up to her.

“How was it?”

Fuun, Louise looking the other way walked directly past them.

Saito snorted. He had hardly talked to Louise since yesterday. After leaving Louise in front of the tent of the dragon knight squadron, the couple had been in a very ugly mood.

Saito walked behind Louise’s back.

“Haah, princess and her servant.” Rene said sarcastically.

Then he lowered his voice and whispered into Saito's ear.

“Just between us… Are you Academy researchers?”

“Academy?” Saito looked at Rene in utter amazement. Interested dragon knights gathered around the boy.

“I guess the flight machine was made by the Academy.”

“Are there any new magical weapons?”

“Like in the recent mission, where one was used in Dartanes to confuse enemies?”

The boy knights’ eyes were sparkling brilliantly while talking to Saito. Apparently, they thought that Louise and Saito were researchers from a magic laboratory. Indeed, the only ones that knew about Louise's Void were a few generals.

Though it was easy to convince the masses outside the court that it all was a war miracle, the same excuse didn’t really work with nobles. So the most plausible explanation would be " the Academy’s new magical weapons".

Louise, listening to Saito’s conversation attentively, halted.

Pon! Saito stopped as well. Everyone stood upright. A tense atmosphere that emanated from Louise sank into all of them. What else would one expect from a duke’s third daughter?

Louise, without turning around, said in a clear voice.

“Not exactly. I am not an Academy researcher. I am Her Majesty's Court Lady, under her direct control.“

Saito panicked. *Hey! Louise you idiot! Void should be kept a secret! It might cause trouble if the rumors would reach the enemy! They would be targeted!* He

thought in a feverish haste.

“We are the members of ‘Zero Organization’ responsible for researching new weapons, under the direct command of the royal family.”

Huh? Saito was speechless. *What Zero Organization? Never heard of it*.

“I-is that so?! Great!”

“Though I do not really understand, it sounds like a really powerful organization!”

“Really? A secret organization? Then you can’t tell anyone? Then you research magical weapons, but how does it differ from the academy’s research? There must be a death punishment for revealing it.”

“R-really?”

“Everyone, swear by the founder to not disclose it!”

All of them, being kind, swore sincerely.

We could pretend to be members of Zero Organization researching new magical weapons. This way enemies or allies would not be able to even imagine the existence of Void.

Saito thought.

If someone started denying the rumors, it would cause even more rumors. But one could make a plausible "true" rumor, to avert curious eyes from the truth.

It was the right thing to do in order to manipulate the information.

He ran up to Louise and whispered.

“…but what have you told me about such a plan. Not much.”

“…I only said following the order of the Princess. Even allies should not know about the Void, thus I came up with an excuse.”

“You! You are not paying attention to my words. You are not listening to what I

say at all!”

“It would be useless, as you cannot act, idiot.”

With a snort, Louise turned her face away and started walking.

“What’s the matter with you and your mistress; you two are moody lately.”

Rene muttered.

Saito answered casually.

“Fuh. You are imagining things.” Hearing his words, Louise turned around.

“You were acting uneasy ever since we returned from giving that report, you were acting dejected and angry. That’s unusual.”

“I am not angry,” Saito repeated.

Louise gave a cold stare to Saito.

“Wha-what…”

With a snort, Louise turned around and walked away in silence. Saito, remembering his decision to ignore her, turned his face away as well.

However, Louise's destination was not Saito‘s tent.

“Hey, where's she going?”

She passed the port where two iron towers were lined up… past the arsenal blast-furnace… and the training grounds on the great plaza.

“Not to our corps.”

Rene said. Indeed, there was the tent of the dragon knight battalion headquarters, which they had visited yesterday. For some reason she passed all the other tents

and walked alone, looking around as if searching for someone.

Nearby there were 20 wind dragons tied to a stake, roaring and barking. It was dangerous going there so far away from the other units.

There was only one person taking care of them.

It was the beautiful and tall priest of Romalia… Julio.

As if spoiling a lover, Julio patted the scruff of the wind dragon's neck. He was talking about something with the dragon. Seeing Louise heading straight towards Julio made Saito’s mood drop even more.

He ran after Louise. Rene followed Saito.

“Mister Cesar.”

When Louise called, a smile appeared on Julio's face. He approached Louise in a hoity-toity manner, took her hand and kissed it.

“Please inform me with an owl or pigeon next time. I would have escorted you.”

“No, I have a business concerning you and your wind dragon.” Louise said.

“Me and my wind dragon?”

“If you are free now, I would like to fly with you.”

Julio, without asking why, bowed with a smile plastered all over his face.

“Not everyday one gets the chance to help such a beautiful lady! There cannot be any question about it! Really, this is an unexpected pleasure!”

“What are you doing?! Stop playing around!”

Saito muttered in an unpleasant tone.

“That’s just how Romalians are.” Rene frowned.

“In any case, where should I fly you to?”

When Julio said that, Saito instantly forgot his oath to ignore and grabbed Louise’s shoulder.

“Hey, Louise.”

“What? You're in the way. Move it.”

Saito, after taking a few deep deep breaths, said,

“If you want to fly, why aren't you using my Zero Fighter? Why this foppish… No, why did you ask this priest of Romalia.”

Snort “Because you are unpleasant,” Louise said clearly.

“Huh?”

“He is well-mannered, gentle and smart. Moreover, he doesn’t have strange thoughts. T-T-Those strange thoughts. Anyone would be better.”

“But that doesn't matter when flying!”

“I will tell you clearly. When riding behind someone, it's better to ride behind a good-looking boy.”

The moment Louise said that, Saito's body hardened.

“…W-W-Wha-what?”

While dripping in cold sweat, only by thinking, Saito said - Louise pointed her finger at Saito.

“What? Jealous? Are you stupid? Whom are you comparing yourself against? Isn’t this handsome, well-dressed priest of Romalia, three, four, five, six-times better than a dog-mole; yet it compares itself against him and is jealous? Isn't it funny? Are you stuuupid? Why don’t you drop dead?”

“Y-you…”

Saito, as if suffocating, closed and opened his mouth few times. The flame of jealousy blazed up violently, almost burning his body up.

“Better luck next time. Since this handsome Priest and I are going on a secret duty, you can clean the tent meanwhile, since you made it dirty. Make sure to make it sparklingly clean. And do the laundry.“

Louise stuck her tongue out at Saito.

Julio, who had climbed on the dragon, called out to Loiuse.

“Ready to go, Miss Vallière.”

“Hold it! I'm coming!” Louise jumped onto the wind dragon.

“Please hold me tightly. You are a jewel of Tristain. There would be a great diplomatic problem if you were to fall!”

“You flirt!”

Louise, giving Saito a wide grin, wrapped her arms around Julio's waist. And, smugly, fixed her hair.

The wind dragon flapped his wings powerfully. Sand and dust flew off the ground, making Saito and others instinctively shut their eyes.

When they opened them, the wind dragon was already high in the sky, flying vividly. Feeling like a fool, Saito watched the wind dragon disappear.

“What’s with her?! What was that?! What an attitude!”

Saito pulled out Derflinger from his shoulder and brandished it in anger. Rene and others jumped away from Saito, panicking; watching him with blank surprise.

“Hey. Nooo, partner, I am also having a tough tiiime!”

“What was that?!”

“Someone, save me from this guyyy…”

“Take this and that! What malicious words!”

“Snap out of iiit… Listen to me, partner. Ah, well, don’t pay attention.”

Extending over the wind dragon, Louise looked down at the ground. The people

at the tent were quickly becoming small. The look of blank surprise all over Saito's face put an oversized grin on Louise's face again. *Look! Such a stupid expression on his face! Whaat? Feeling jealous?*

"Bleeh!" Louise stuck her tongue out towards the ground again.

"Now then, where should I fly to?"

A voice coming from the front, brought Louise back.

"W-well…" she hesitated whether to say it or not.

"Where should we scout?" Julio repeated.

"F-from where do you know that it is a scouting mission?"

"Even a child could guess that! It can't be anything but duty! But, one thing I cannot understand!"

"What?"

"A VIP researcher of the academy like you doing a scout's duty! Unimaginable! Don't familiars usually work as scouts?"

Louise was tightly holding the Founder's Prayer Book with her left hand. In order not to lose it, she made a bag for it, reaching down her waist with a leather string over her.

"That's a test from the upper department. To see… how good our researched magical weapons are. Surely all of the tests will be passed."

"To check the good and bad sides."

Louise nodded.

Louise started thinking about her legendary power – she learned that it was nothing more than just a gear in the giant country and army mechanisms. How much can you use it? What can you use it for? Can you use it for your own needs? *The great generals also looked at me with those kind of eyes.*

Though it is natural, there is no point in lying to myself. I am not Louise

Françoise, I am a user of Void.

But the two might be one and the same. I‘m just fooling myself with family members and classmates, because I am just a user of Void...

While she was lost in such musings, a laughter echoed.

“W-what?“

“Ah, sorry! The City of Saxe-Gotha!”

“An ancient town. I heard it is beautiful. We cannot let it be destroyed by war.”

This made Louise speechless and Julio turned around.

“Well, I understand - there is war now. However, I am a priest,” he laughed.

He gave her a charming smile. This made Louise’s cheeks blaze on their own.

“I, I see.”

Julio, still turned around, brought his face close to Louise’s.

“You are truly beautiful, Miss Vallière.”

Pulling away slightly, a confused Louise asked,

“B-but why is Romalia helping? They're not our allies…”

“On our own will! Small help! Today’s Albion may affect all countries in Halkeginia. If the monarchy were to be overthrown, what would happen with the nobility in the republic? If that happens it would be a serious threat! A republic nightmare for all countries. Romalia is no exception, governed by the Pope."

“I do not understand politics well.”

“I am the same. I also do not have much interest in it. I am much more interested talking about other things...“

“Like?”

“Like, how can you be so beautiful, just like a fairy?"

He asked with a serious expression, Louise looked down slightly.

“Don’t say silly things, look more carefully. You are badly mistaken.”

“Excuses. According to Azuro, we are going the right way. We are flying to the city of Saxe-Gotha, right?”

Louise became suspicious. This priest was not a mage. In other words, his abilities were those of a commoner. And even for a mage, it would take some time to establish a connection between him and his familiar…

So how could a priest, who was not even a mage, communicate so well with a beast that was not a familiar? How was this possible?

Julio laughed at Louise’s vacant look.

“The same way that you can use Academy’s magic weapons, I can use God's miracle.”

“Stop joking.”

God's miracle? It must be some kind of joke. God is a metaphysical being. Such power in a world where magic rules the reason of the world is impossible.

“What! Yes, it's a joke! However, I know about animals more than others! Naa, Azuro!”

The wind dragon barked and started increasing his speed.

Two people were flying through the sky of city of Saxe-Gotha for one hour.

The town was encircled by walls, with colorful brick houses behind them. The town’s population was close to 40,000 people.

“Fly lower.”

Julio nodded and started to fly lower. They could see townspeople waving. They probably mistook them for allies. Then Julio smiled and muttered something to the wind dragon. Azuro spread his wings and started to shake in a strange way.

“What are you doing?“

“Mimicking Albion wind dragon’s movement. With this ‘dance’ Albion’s wind dragon looks for a companion. Albion dragon knights use it to identify foe or friend.”

“Your Azuro is from Albion?”

“Are you kidding? I trained him myself!”

“You're great.”

Louise felt admiration. It is not easy even for an average mage to train a dragon.

“It is good to study enemy movements beforehand.”

When Louise nodded and looked at the town scenery below. She could give a report while using the "Illusion" spell, providing vivid images seen from above. After seeing this, she could create images from her memory with the Illusion spell.

The instructions to use "Illusion" came from the staff section. Louise's Void could be applied in military planning. It was the moment when she finally realized that she was just a tool.

In the town’s plaza, they noticed a big monster striding.

“An orc.”

“Yeah. Is it my imagination… or are there a lot of soldiers missing?”

Not just her imagination. There were just orcs, trolls and demi-humans armed with spears and clubs. Though they could see a mage commanding them… there were no soldiers in sight.

“Using demi-humans as an army replacement is cheap stuff. However… those brutal orc demons are following the humans as well…”

“There must be some kind of trick. However I do not know how that mage can make them obey.”

Louise concentrated her spirit and began imprinting the spectacle in her mind.

When one used the Void element for big, one-time spells, collecting willpower took time. And since it was already used a few days ago… she could not turn such a huge landscape into an illusion.

“Circle over the town once more.”

“It might be dangerous. This cover will not last forever.”

Julio muttered - he was dancing an Albion wind dragon dance for five minutes.

“Facts and figures are needed. The amount of will for the spell is insufficient, so I can do nothing but write on paper.”

Louise, ignoring the danger, wrote down information regarding the town on the parchment, while shuttling many times over the town. With those notes 'Illusion' was used in order to take as many facts and figures home as possible. While seeing Louise in such a state, Julio smiled.

“There was no point for jealousy, right?”

“Eh? Eeh? What are you talking about?!”

“Without weapons it is dangerous and you were worried. Not for yourself… but for that familiar. Danger cannot be helped. It is because of duty. However, I cannot be brave in rash danger. Do you differ? Why oh why, are you leaving this calm part out in anger. I wonder if it's because you're a girl?”

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

Louise said with a furious blush on her cheeks.

“That flying machine is out of bullets, right? There are no other secret weapons. Other than for fast flights, it's useless.”

“…How do you know this?”

“I was onboard the *Varsenda*. Being curious, I examined that flying machine attached to the deck. Extremely well made! Amazing!”

“Curiosity killed the cat.”

Julio laughed from Louise’s threatening words.

“Please be relieved! I am your ally! I wasn’t thinking of any ploy to use you, unlike your generals… Now then, our time has run out.”

“Not yet. Wait a little.”

“It's impossible.”

“It's an order!”

“It's an enemy.”

Julio pointed with his chin. Nine wind dragons were flying directly at them.

Louise was stupefied.

“Escape!”

“…nnh, impossible. I've become too addicted to this chat!“

Smiling, Julio muttered. The enemy was faster in the sky. It was not possible to get away even when flying at one's best.

Staring at the closing wind dragons, Louise trembled. Gathering information for the generals, may have been overdone. She bit her lip, thinking about the possibility of death in terror.

She shook her head, trying to shake off such fears… Somehow… she needed to counterattack with Void. But how many explosions could be shot? Her willpower… was low. The scale would be small. Would they hit well enough?

While she was thinking that, the instructions came from Julio.

“Louise, are you good at horseback riding?”

Though she was suddenly called by her first name, it wasn’t the right time to complain about it. She nodded with a suspicious expression on her face.

“Y-yeah…I am.”

“Hold on tight then! As if you were jumping over fences and bushes with a gallop! Azuro!“

The wind dragon let out a small bark and sped up aiming towards the enemy.

“Hey! Hey! Don’t go there! You can’t use magic!”

Julio thrust straight into the enemy's dragon knight formation. Louise screamed,

“Hey! Ah! Magic spell! Nooooo!”

All nine dragon knights shot spells one after another. Shining blades and fireballs flew towards them. When she started to recite magic too, Julio shouted at her.

“Don’t let go!”

When the magic was about to hit… the wind dragon suddenly pulled an unexpected movement. It twisted it’s body and suddenly shot up in the air, avoiding spells one after another.

Unbelievable. A wind dragon was moving at a speed that was unimaginable for such a body. It was moving like a small bird, surprising even their enemies. For a moment, their speed decreased.

“Breath! Azuro!”

A big breath of fire escaped the wind dragon's mouth. It hit the dragon knight in the front making him crash down.

Then, passing through the other, it used its nails to tear up another dragon's wings. Another one headed down.

Dumbfounded, Louise stared at the spectacle.

How can a wind dragon release such a big breath?! Unbelievable!

The remaining enemy dragon knights, whose number had decreased to seven, turned around and headed back at them.

It was as one would expect from Albion’s dragon knights.

Though for a moment they were surprised by Julio’s wind dragon's movements, they regained their composure now. Dividing into two lines, they flinchingly moved forwards.

They started forming and closing a circle around them.

It seemed like they had closed their retreating paths carefully, planning to kill them.

In a movement that could be called casual, Julio's Azuro entered the circle. The enemy in front tried to run, keeping a considerable distance.

But once Azuro turned a head towards that enemy, another one flew from the back. It appeared like the one in front was just a decoy.

“Behind you! Behind you!”

Though Louise screamed, Julio, with a smile on his lips, kept on running after the decoy.

The enemy from behind, thinking that Julio's attention was surely focused on the decoy, started closing in steadily.

At the same time, when the enemy from behind released the spell, Azuro twisted around. Following the enemy’s movements from behind, dodging the attack with a wild somersault, Azuro spewed another breath.

Wrapped up in the breath, the attacking dragon knight fell down.

Shocked, Louise stared at the sudden development.

The movements of the dragon were unbelievably vivid, without making any unnecessary movements.

“H-how can you make a dragon move like that?!”

“Don’t talk, or you’ll bite your tongue.”

Julio’s tone of voice remained perfectly composed.

With three of them gone, the atmosphere around the enemy changed. Louise ducked her head, feeling the bursting anger. The encirclement loosened for a moment, and then, all of the dragon knights, at once, plunged at them.

For a moment, Louise rocked up and down, side to side. Her body felt like a ball in the hands of juggler. Forgetting to keep her eyes open she closed them... Louise was clinging to Julio.

Every time Azuro turned, he was doing a severe damage with his fangs and claws to the opponent‘s wind dragons. To avoid the enemy‘s attacks, he himself attacked.

In only four seconds, six of them were beaten and fell down.

“It has ended. Let's return then.”

Julio said in a nonchalant voice.

“Wh-what happened?”

The wind dragon together with rider, were a single movement.

No, it was beyond any explanation, the movements of the unbelievable Azuro,

“I just brought out the true ability of the dragon. Everyone else’s dragons were making too many useless movements. That’s all.”

Julio said casually. And Louise understood… why he, not being a mage, had become the commander of the third squadron.

Chapter Four: The Secretary and the Emperor

In Albion's capital city Londinium, there was a heated discussion going on over the sortie at White Hall.

Because the Albion army was attracted to Dartanes by Louise's "Illusion", they let the chance to defeat the enemy army at the coast escape. If they had properly assaulted the enemy as they landed in Rosais, it would have been possible to chase the enemy from Albion to Halkeginia...

"Now that the enemy has finished disembarking and set up camp, it would be suicidal to attempt a counterattack from this side."

At a round table where about fifteen people sat, a young general sitting on the north side said in exhaustion. It was just like he said. Half of Albion's air force, that had forty vessels left, were sunk in the battle the other day, while the remaining ships had received heavy damage. They couldn't even sortie ten ships.

On the other hand, Tristain and Germania's combined fleet lost twelve vessels and eight received heavy damage, but there were still forty able to fight. They had complete air superiority in this situation.

On top of that, the number of people in the Albion army were decreasing. At the battle of Tarbes, they lost three thousand, and the loss the other day caused the morale of the entire army to drop; some groups ended up deserting. The vigor shown during the revolution was no longer there.

Against the sixty-thousand who claimed air superiority, there was no way they could continue attacking. Stares of blame were focused on Cromwell, the Holy Albion Republic Chairman and first Albion Emperor, who was sitting in the middle.

Because after failing many strategies, he had let the enemy land.

However, Cromwell shook off the stares... and remained nonchalant.

General Hawkins, who was substantially taking command of Albion's main force, spoke,

"The inversion is my miss. I let the opportunity to annihilate the enemy in one move, escape. There are no words to apologize."

"Our army is in rags," Cromwell smiled.

"And the operation to take the children at the academy hostage failed as well."

Even though he failed, it didn't seem like he was troubled over it.

With a sigh and in a tired voice, Hawkins said,

"The magic weapons the enemy used were stronger than we imagined."

"Miss Sheffield."

The black-covered secretary behind Cromwell, Sheffield, nodded and read the report written on the parchment.

"The 'Illusion' that appeared near Dartanes stayed for thirteen hours and suddenly disappeared afterwards."

"It is just a makeshift magic that creates illusions. What is there to fear?"

"It had an enormous effect."

Hawkins said, closing his eyes. Confusion through illusions caused the army to be brought back... In other words, it was creating an effect that was no different from a military force of tens of thousands. He couldn't make light of this as just an illusion.

"To be honest, I am afraid of the enemy. Besides the illusion at Dartanes, the enemy uses many unknown magic. That magic light which destroyed our fleet..."

Cromwell faced Sheffield and nodded.

Sheffield once again read the parchment in a well resounding voice, like a choir singing a hymn in a temple.

"It is concluded... that the enemy is not in the condition to attack with the light that annihilated our fleet at Tarbes."

"Why is that?

"If they were to use it, they would have used it in the fleet battle before landing the other day."

"The possibility they are reserving it for later?"

"The enemy army would have been in a devastating situation if they lost that fleet battle. If they were to use everything they could, then, most certainly, they would have released that 'miraculous light'. But the enemy fought conventionally. Though our army lost regardless."

"It is fine if we win on land," Cromwell took over for her.

Hearing this, the headquarter's staff general stood up.

"Your Excellency, the general staff assumes that the enemy is headed to capture the city of Saxe-Gotha. This is..." Tapping the tip of his staff on the map on the table, he explained.

"It is the meeting point of the main road and an important metropolis. As a factor that supports the assumption, the enemy's reconnaissance has become active around here. A few days ago, dragon knights, thought to be for reconnaissance purposes, came flying and fought with our army's dragon knight squadron. We should position our main forces in City of Saxe-Gotha and wait for the enemy."

The other generals raised voices of approval. It was a plausible strategy.

However, Cromwell shook his head.

"The main forces will not move from Londinium."

"Do you plan to sit and wait for defeat?"

Hawkins looked at Cromwell as if he was a child who refused to let his toys get taken away. Cromwell shook his head once again.

"General, I do not mind if the city of Saxe-Gotha is taken."

"You give the enemy a strategic base right under your nose. The enemy will probably replenish their low supplies at the metropolis and rest."

"We will not give them supplies."

"How?"

"Take all of the food away from the residents."

Hawkins was at a loss for words. *What a...* Cromwell was trying to use the residents of Saxe-Gotha.

"The enemy will end up having to give their little amount of food to the residents. It'll slow them down. This plan is wiser than rashly proceeding through a defensive battle and suffering losses."

"What will we do if the enemy abandons them! Many people will die from starvation!"

"That will not happen. What, even if the enemy abandons them, it is just one city. Between the importance of a country, it is a trivial sacrifice."

Those were cold words, unthinkable of an ex-prelate. However, what he said was right.

The allied forces did not invade to negotiate with Cromwell. They came to abolish Cromwell and dominate this land. Eight to nine chances out of ten, they would think about the civilians after the war and perform charity.

Still... What will we do if we win? At the worst, a whole metropolis could revolt. That is how fearful the resentment from food is.

"You plan to make a whole metropolis your enemy... Either way, there will be unpleasant aftereffects..."

"Why do you think I arranged for those sub-humans to be sent ahead? All we have to do is say it was their own decision."

It was unknown how, but Cromwell excelled in negotiation with sub-humans. Knowing that the sub-humans were sent ahead not for a normal army operation but for this kind of strategy, the generals were dumbfounded.

Their leader broke a treaty, not only used makeshift means to commence strategies, but finally planned to betray his own country's civilians through cowardly measures.

"I will also place a trap in the water of Saxe-Gotha."

"Do you plan to throw poison in the water? Something like poison will be quickly washed away."

"Not poison. 'Void'."

"'Void'?"

"That's right. It will become interesting. However, it will take time for the effects to work," Cromwell smiled.

Standing up... He raised his fist.

"Gentlemen, it's the Pentecost! Stop the enemy until then! When the Pentecost ends... 'Void' and the crossing of two staffs will drop the iron hammer upon our haughty enemies!"

The crossing of two staffs was the crest of the Gallia royal family.

"OHH! Finally, Gallia!" The conference room became excited.

"At that time, our army will advance! To demolish our haughty enemies! I promise you!"

Sensing the atmosphere on the grounds heating up, Cromwell walked briskly to the balcony.

The generals and cabinet ministers stood up and followed him.

"Let all of our cabinet ministers encourage our brave and loyal soldiers!"

Voices of jubilation surrounded Cromwell and the others.

In the vast courtyard once built to wait on the king's audience, crazily enthusiastic trust was being offered to Cromwell, and the monarch's guards were lining in rows.

Thousands of voices of jubilation reached him. Cromwell waved his hand to answer.

"The enemy has landed on fatherland! Everyone! I question you brave revolutionary soldiers! Is this defeat?"

"No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No! No!"

A ring of jubilation surrounded Cromwell.

"Exactly! This is not defeat! Absolutely not! I promise you victory! To you all, peerless, loyal, and brave who took the crown from that incompetent king, I promise you victory! Our haughty enemies will be destroyed when the Pentecost ends! They have touched God's wrath! Listen! Listen! The ones leading the lost Halkeginia are the civilians of Albion, who are chosen by God! For that reason, the Founder has entrusted power to me!"

There were numerous soldiers who died in battle lined up on the balcony.

Cromwell raised his ring up high.

Doing so... the dead soldiers revived and walked off.

"Everyone! As long as we have this 'Void', we cannot be defeated! Believe in me! Believe in our fatherland! Believe in 'Void', the power of us who were chosen by the founder!"

"Void! Void! Void! Void! Void! Void! Void! Void! Void! Void!"

"That's right, Void!" Cromwell swung his fist.

"The founder is with us! Do not fear! The founder is with us!"

The enthusiasm in the courtyard reached a climax. Cromwell shouted in a loud voice.

"Long live the revolution! Destroy the enemy!"

The enthusiasm even reached the balcony.

"Long live the revolution! Destroy the enemy! Long live the revolution! Destroy the enemy! Long live the revolution! Destroy the enemy!"

"Long live the Holy Albion republic!"

"Long live the Holy Albion Republic! Long live the Holy Albion Republic! Long live the Holy Albion Republic! Long live the Holy Albion Republic!"

"Long live our Highness the Holy Emperor!" One of the cabinet ministers stood up and shouted in a loud voice.

"Long live our Highness the Holy Emperor! Long live our Highness the Holy Emperor! Long live our Highness the Holy Emperor! Long live our Highness the Holy Emperor! Long live our Highness the Holy Emperor!"

The endless shouting was sucked into the air.

After the wildly enthusiastic audience...

Cromwell was sitting, troubled, in a gigantic private room that was once the King's bedroom. His body was shaking slightly.

Sheffield was standing in front of him, whispering to him while looking down at him.

"That was a brilliant speech, Prelate."

The man, who was called a prelate in his previous position, as if falling off the chair, kneeled down at Sheffield's feet.

The mask of dignity he had shown earlier had been blown off.

Just a man in his thirties that was panicking in fear, just a thin man who was

nothing but a prelate was there.

"Ohhhhhhh! Miss! Miss Sheffield! That person! Will that person really send soldiers to this abominable country? This is not the words of that general just not... I! I am scared! I, a thin man who can't even control magic, am afraid!"

To Cromwell, Sheffield spoke in a voice as if to comfort a child.

"What are you saying. To be afraid now! The one who said 'I want to be King' at that bar was you. Because I was impressed by those candid words, I decided to give you, as my master, Albion."

"Perhaps a mere prelate has dreamed too much... Tempted by you and 'that person', I obtained The Ring of Andvari, collected nobles that held contempt towards the royal family, and excuted my revenge on Albion's royal family who had humiliated me... To a point, it was fun. Oh it was fun, it was like I was dreaming."

"It's that simple."

"Ohh, just this continent above the sky is too much for an accessory like me... Why was it necessary to invade Tristain and Germania?"

"How many times does it take for you to understand. It is necessary to join Halkeginia into one. To recover the Holy Land is the only way to follow the Founder and God's will."

"To me, that is a part of being a clergyman. Though there is no mistake that recovering the Holy Land is a dream..."

"Then continue to dream."

"The responsibility is too heavy! The enemy has invaded! Enemy in my country! The enemy has come to hang me like those incompetent kings! What should I do?! Tell me this isn't a nightmare. Miss..." Smiling, Sheffield squatted down in front of Cromwell and looked into his tear-soaked face. Cromwell raised his face. Lifting up his chin, Sheffield... "Stop acting spoiled," whispered quietly.

"Yes!"

The polite and warm demeanor just now had disappeared, and Sheffield had made a complete change into a raptores-like face.

Her brunette hair, like deep darkness, fluttered and the eyes below it were releasing a bewitching radiance. Taken in by those eyes, Cromwell began to tremble.

"You dream a sweet molasses-like dream that a normal priest couldn't see even if he reincarnated a hundred times and now you say you don't want to see a nightmare? 'My country'? Your land doesn't even stretch fifty centimeters on this uselessly destitute country Albion."

"I'm! I'm very sorry!"

Cromwell slid his face on the floor beside Sheffield's feet. Sticking out his tongue, he licked Sheffield's shoes.

"Forgive me... Fo, forgive me... Ha, hagi... Forgive me..."

"The Ring of Andvari."

Timidly, Cromwell handed the ring he was wearing to Sheffield.

Treasure of the Water Spirit, the magic ring that can grant the dead false life...

Cromwell remembered the day where he went with Sheffield and Gallia's mage knights to Ragdorian Lake to steal this ring from the Water Spirit.

What caused the start of everything was him talking at a bar. He was heading towards Gallia's capital, Lutèce, because he was delivering something...

Cromwell was treating a beggar to a bottle of wine.

"Prelate, as thanks for the wine, I will grant you one thing you wish. Tell me."

Being told that by the beggar, Cromwell said as a joke,

"Let's see, I want to be king."

"King, is it?"

The beggar, with his face covered in a deep rope, smiled and asked.

"Yes," Cromwell nodded.

Of course, he meant it to be a joke. Playing around after drinking. He wasn't serious about it. However, the next morning... This Sheffield came to the lodge he was staying at. She exclaimed,

"I will make you king. Follow me."

At that moment, his life as a local prelate delineated to a different path. At a violent momentum...

Sheffield was patting The Ring of Andvari dearly.

The stone on the ring was, enchantingly, glowing deep light blue.

"What do you think is the power stored in this ring?"

Cromwell shook his head. He knew that it could revive corpses. That is the truth. There is no way he could know about the mechanisms of Void.

"Unable to control magic, I do not know. You are the one who told me to call this power 'Void', right?"

"Do you know about 'wind stones'?"

Cromwell nodded. It is the material used to allow flying ships to float. A magic stone said to be the condensed power of Wind. There are countless mines for digging out wind stones in Albion.

"This is a similar substance."

"Then it isn't 'Void'?"

"Correct, this is not 'Void'. 'Wind stones' and this 'Ring of Andvari' are just drops of the source of the powers that rule this world. This is the material that becomes the source of power called Ancient Magic. There are all kinds of names it is called by though. Sage's Stone, Orb of Life... Historically, it would be called 'Void's enemy'..."

"I am constantly impressed by the profoundness of your knowledge."

"That is why every time it is used, its magic is whittled and it gets smaller. See."

Cromwell nodded.

"The point is, this is a crystallization of the Ancient Magic of Water. The condensed magic hidden in this is incomparable to the wind stones common around here... A rare stone. Which is the reason this is the protected treasure of the Water Spirit... The Ring of Andvari. In other words, the ancients' treasure..."

Sheffield stared at the ring.

Doing so... Her forehead started to shine.

The light was flowing from inside.

When Cromwell first saw this light, he was surprised. When Sheffield touched this 'Ring of Andvari', her forehead shone.

Are there times when people's foreheads shine?

Even when he asked Sheffield, she did not answer. This mysterious female would not teach him anything that mattered, anything essential. She only handed down orders.

With the stone, Sheffield lightly combed Cromwell's cheek.

"Ho, hohhhhhhh..."

Cromwell twitched and shivered. The Ring of Andvari vibrated slightly. Just touching it made him feel like an electric current was running through him.

When it touched Sheffield's hand, the Ring of Andvari awoke... it was that kind of vibration.

"Do you know? The trait of the power of Water?"

"H-healing wounds..."

"That is on the surface. The power of 'Water' rules over the body's constitution.

The heart too."

"...Ha, hah"

"Moving corpses is only one of the powers this ring holds."

Chapter Five: The Ancient City of Saxe-Gotha

Roughly a mile out from the battlements at the city of Saxe-Gotha, at the staging area for the assault, the three hundred and fifty troops of the De Vineuil Battalion were awaiting the horn to signal the beginning of the attack.

Today, fifteen days after the landing, the allied army was finally launching their offensive.

Leading the 2nd Company, Guiche was shivering from head to toe, staring intently at the mist-covered city of Saxe-Gotha.

“Company commander, sir!”

The sergeant on guard at his side, Nicola, spoke in a soft tone.

“W-w-w-what is it?” Guiche stammered.

“You dropped your wand.”

Guiche immediately looked below at his feet and saw his rose-shaped wand lying on the ground.

He frantically picked it back up and shoved it into his chest pocket, while trying to maintain the solemn expression on his face.

“Company commander, sir!”

“W-what is it?”

“Although it might not be my concern, I still think it would be better for you to go take a leak first.”

Guiche immediately glared at him and exclaimed,

“I’ve already gone!”

“That’s good, then,” Nicola replied while grinning.

“There’s nothing to be nervous about. According to the reports in the past few days, the enemy’s cannons have all been destroyed by our fleet’s bombardment, and they’ve only deployed demi-humans to guard the streets.”

“Those d-demi-humans are incredibly ferocious, and their bodies are massive.”

“But they are foes that are incredibly easy to lure into traps,” Nicola remarked while watching ahead.

Guiche observed the small man carrying a musket. This was the first real battle he had participated in, and there was no one else he could rely on. With such thoughts in his mind, the man in front of him appeared to be larger than any lunkhead he knew.

“However… from where could we start our assault? The whole city is surrounded by those huge rock walls…”

Hearing Guiche’s concern, Nicola nodded his head.

“Someone’s going to come to ‘open a route’ for us soon.”

After some time idly passing by, a fleet of battleships appeared in the skies above. The ten battleships, by then all neatly lined up in a row, proceeded to bombard the wall with cannon fire. In the face of the floating battleships’ firepower, the enemy was completely powerless.

“Boom—! Boom—! Boom—!” Accompanied by the thunderous roar of cannon fire and thick clouds of smoke, the walls began to crumble and cheers could be heard erupting from the soldiers assembled at the staging area. Under the barrage of cannon fire, the walls along the battlements collapsed.

And then, appearing right in front of their eyes, was a group of huge mud golems.

“They must be golems made by Triangle-class mages.” Guiche thought to himself.

Since he himself was a Dot-class mage, he couldn't create such large golems. He looked up at them in admiration – Although they were slightly smaller than the mud golems created by Fouquet of the Crumbling Dirt, whom had once rattled the whole of Tristain, they were still huge. The mud golems, with a height of roughly twenty meters, solidly stumbled along, gradually drawing closer to the collapsed walls.

On the backs of the mud golems were flags bearing the family emblems of their respective creators, and Guiche, upon noticing a familiar emblem amongst them, instinctively yelled out loud,

“T-that's my brother’s mud golem!”

It must belong to his brother, since the flag fluttering on its back bore the emblem of the Gramont family, ‘A Rose and Panther’.

At that instant, with a whoosh, a large object of some sort flew straight towards the mud golems approaching the wall. Wham! One of the mud golems had its abdomen shot through, making a gaping hole. The golem immediately lost its balance, and collapsed into a heap onto the ground. The metallic lights shot towards the approaching golems one after another, felling many of them as they were struck by its fire.

“What in the world was that?” Guiche gasped.

“It’s a giant ballista,” Nicola replied immediately. “I’m afraid they're probably operated by the orcs. It's a three meter-long weapon based on the crossbow, capable of shooting giant bolts. If a human were to be struck by it, they would surely be smashed to pieces. But then again, they're not designed to be used against people.”

Guiche worriedly watched his brother’s golem. A bolt was sticking out of the golem’s leg, but fortunately, the mud golem still remained standing.

“Is the Company Commander... a member of the Gramont family?” Nicola asked, noticing Guiche’s excitement.

“I’m the youngest son.”

Hearing Guiche’s reply, Nicola's eyes opened wide in astonishment.

“That means you are the Marshal’s…! What a surprise! What brought you to a lowly musket battalion like ours? With your father’s name, whether it be the knights, or an elite regimental headquarters, wouldn’t you be able to join any battalion you desire?”

“If I were to use my father’s name, does it not mean that it is no longer because of my merit?” Guice replied as he looked to the front.

Nicola was unable to say anything, but after a while, he grinned and slapped Guiche’s shoulder.

“I like your kind of attitude, young master. Since that’s how it is, we ain’t returning back home until we win our merit and glory!”

Soon after, a squadron of dragon knights arrived as well. Heading straight towards the ballistae on the battlements, and with a combination of magic and dragon fire, they quickly silenced the ballistae.

Finally arriving at the foot of the collapsed wall, which had been turned into rubble by the cannon fire earlier, the mud golems began clearing away the rubble.

“They're making an entrance.”

His men would soon rush into the city through that entry. Guiche’s entire body began to tremble uncontrollably.

“You're shaking?”

“…E-even though I would really like to say it's due to the excitement…it's most probably because of fear. Ugh…”

“Heh, being honest is a good thing, you will never succeed on reckless courage alone. But, you can’t be too cowardly either. Regardless, just let me take care of it.”

Nicola raised his hands towards the roughly hundred musketeers behind him. Another fifty or so pikemen acted as their guard. This company consisting of roughly hundred and fifty men, were the soldiers under the command of Guiche.

“Prime and load your cartridge—!”

The musketeers then leisurely loaded their barrels with bullets and gunpowder.

“Company Commander sir, might I trouble you to light this?” Nicola pulled a length of slow match towards Guiche.

Guiche nodded, and cast an ‘Ignite’ spell on the cord. Accompanying the sizzling noise of the slow match smouldering, a burning smell hung in the air. Nicola called a soldier over, and handed the ignited cord over to be distributed amongst the other soldiers.

“This is a slow match given by our company commander! Make sure that it is not extinguished!”

The response that returned lacked any sense of enthusiasm.

Rumble—! The golems cleared away the wall. At that moment, Nicola poked Guiche in the waist and said,

“Company Commander sir, let’s go.”

Raising his wand while still trembling, Guiche yelled out,

“G-G-Gramont Company, forward!”

The veteran musketeers followed behind with staggering footsteps. It was only then that Guiche realised – it was only his own company that was charging forward! The order to charge hadn’t been passed down from the top yet!

“Hey, Sergeant—“ He was about to voice his complaint, but stopped upon noticing Nicola’s calm and confident expression.

Once a company had begun advancing, it was almost impossible to halt their advance, and thus they could only continue moving forward.

A few seconds later, an order to “Charge!” resounded from the ranks behind.

Like a surging tidal wave, soldiers, knights, and assorted others all stormed in their direction.

“We're all old veterans after all. If we don’t start out a bit earlier, we won’t be able to keep up.”

Probably because they had set out earlier, Guiche’s company was the first to reach one of the breaches along the battlements. But a couple of knights swept past them, storming into the city.

“But we were the first to get here!” Guiche shouted as he prepared to storm inside, right before Nicole grabbed him.

Immediately afterwards, the knights which had just charged in were sent flying back out together with their mounts, landing in front of Guiche in a miserable state. It seemed that on the other side of the wall were club-wielding orcs, waiting for simple-minded fools like them to deliver themselves to their doom.

Enormous monsters with a size at least five times that of a human, the group of orcs spotted Guiche's party and immediately stormed towards them. Guiche remembered the time when he had gone treasure-hunting with everyone; how they had been ambushed by orcs like these as well. His bronze golems had been pummelled into oblivion by them back then.

A sense of dread welled up within him.

“Fire! Fire! Quickly, fire!” Guiche began to yell frantically.

“Don’t fire just yet! Company Commander sir! Use an incantation to knock over that guy furthest at the back! Quickly!”

Then, acting accordingly to what he had said, Guiche waved his artificial rose. Erupting from the ground below, a hand grabbed a hold of the leg of the orc at the back.

With a "Crash!" right in the middle of the narrow breach in the wall, the orc tripped over.

“1st platoon! The leading group is your target! Fire!”

Without delay, Nicola issued the order to pour volley fire onto the orc at the head of the approaching group.

The thirty or so musketeers fired their guns in concert at the leading orc, shredding it to a honeycomb. The other orcs at the forefront were felled onto the ground as well, blocking the advance of the group behind them. Not the type to let such an opportunity go, Nicola bellowed his next order without hesitation.

“2nd platoon! Fire—!”

Although the orcs were capable of waving their clubs about even after a barrage of bullets, they still couldn’t endure the impact of the dozens of bullets fired at such close quarters.

The orcs which were trailing behind decided to retreat, but between the narrow breach of the wall and the orc at the rear that had been knocked to the ground by Guiche’s magic, they were unable to move. At the front, they were obstructed by the corpses of their allies. Just as they stumbled and trudged through the corpses to charge through, they were greeted with the volley fire of the remaining musketeers.

The last few remaining orcs were then met with the charging pikemen and were quickly eliminated.

Staring at the twenty or so orc corpses on the ground, Guiche exclaimed in admiration,

“S-so powerful...”

While he instructed the musketeers to reload their bullets, Nicolas revealed a grin.

“It's because these guys are very simple-minded- once they spot the enemy, they’ll come charging straight at them.”

The veteran sergeant laughed as he patted Guiche’s shoulder.

“Company Commander sir, look, now you can earn the highest merit.”

And just like that, the ragtag Battalion demonstrated an extraordinary level of solidarity. Meanwhile on another front, was the solitary "trump card" of the allied army.

It was Louise and her familiar.

Saxe-Gotha was built upon a relatively high mountain. Encircled on all sides by a wall, a main road shaped like a five-pointed star was constructed within. Legend says that this was the first city built by the Founder on the continent of Albion; Whether this was the truth or not was impossible to know.

However, it was only the five roads of that pentagram that displayed that elegant geometric design, within it was a complex of countless side streets and disorderly alleyways. It was no different than the other cities that could be seen all over Halkeginia.

At the moment, Louise was running frantically through a small alleyway. Saito could be seen by her side with Delflinger firmly in his grasp, followed closely by the various members of the dragon knights in disguise.

Chasing them from their rear were ten or so huge trolls and fang-bearing ogres; both were giants that measured roughly five meters tall.

Fortunately, this being a small alleyway, the beasts seemed to be struggling to squeeze through. Because they were crashing through protruding walls and windows alike as they chased through, it took them quite a while. If it had been a wide open plain instead, Louise and them would surely have been caught up to in an instant.

To find out why Louise was running back and forth through the maze of alleyways within Saxe-Gotha, we would have to begin from the mission that they had accepted.

In the simplest sense, their objective coincided with that of the assaulting main force: Infiltrate the city from the opposite side. Their original purpose was to use "Illusion" to create a phantom army, thus plunging the enemy into disarray…

“Why did you have to suddenly yell out like that?! Hey!” shouted Louise as she ran.

Three hours ago, they had snuck into the city under the cover of darkness.

“Didn’t I already tell you? No matter what you see, don’t act surprised! Hey!”

“B-but... It's too big! That troll thing! That ogre or something!”

The thing is, Louise’s Void magic required an exceptionally long incantation period.

Just as she was chanting the incantation on a street corner whilst pretending to be preaching, an Albion noble responsible for patrolling went over to inquire:

“Who are you people supposed to be?”

“We are participants in the Founder’s Rite of Passage, which has brought us to this ancient city of Saxe-Gotha. We wish for Albion to achieve victory, so we are currently praying to the heavens.”

Although René had said so without blinking an eye, the patrolling magician, with a peculiar expression, still asked..

“Don’t tell me... you're spies sent by Tristain and Germania?!”

Louise hastily shook her head rapidly.

René also shook his head.

Then Saito, noticing the huge troll standing behind the magician, inadvertently cried out loud:

“It's so big! Just what is it?”

The magician immediately brought his face close to Saito, who had unwittingly cried out. “A very rarely seen face...”

I’m suspected, Saito thought, assuming a straight posture. The magician meticulously measured Saito up.

“Let me ask you - who is the General that commands the 2nd Army of the Holy Republic of Albion?”

Saito tensed up.

A general!? How am I supposed to know things like this? Looking around him, all he could see were the beads of the sweat on everyone’s foreheads. *Crap, the success of the mission depends all on my answer. But... I have no idea what the general’s name is.*

The enemy magician pressed his face closer, glaring fiercely at him, and said,

“What’s wrong? You don’t know? You don’t even know the name of the General who protects this place? Do you really hail from Albion? Spit it out!!”

Saito’s mind began plunge into disarray. And, having plunged into disarray...his mind was completely blank.

“Tokugawa Ieyasu.”

He made up such an answer. When it came to general’s names, he only knew this one.

“What Tokugawa Ieyasu?! Where’s he from?! Why couldn’t you give a more appropriate answer?!" shouted Louise as she ran.

“It’s not like there was another choice! He was the only one I knew!”

“Whatever, I won’t blame you for now.”

No, rather it was all his fault, but nothing could be done now. Louise continued,

“But why didn’t you just take care of them like usual? There was only a few of them!”

When Saito had replied “Tokugawa Ieyasu”, the mage was taken aback, before yelling “Suspicious persons!” and launching a surprise attack with the troll.

Saito was originally going to block their attacks... but was sent flying by the troll in one hit.

The overwhelming strength of the gigantic humanoid creatures... it was difficult to endure, even though he was Gandálfr. And there were almost ten of those monsters, to boot. *Even if I can't kill them, I should be able to at least resist their attacks*... However, today's Saito was not the same as his usual self.

"What's wrong, Partner? Why don't I sense any enthusiasm from you?"

After blocking the enemy attack, even Derflinger noticed. Somehow, with Rene's and other's magic cover, they were able to repel the enemy and run away. However, since most of dragon knights were Dot mages, they quickly ran out of magic.

The number of pursuers increased while they were trying to escape. Residents all along the street slightly opened windows and anxiously watched the chase.

At that moment, from the other side of the town, the explosive sound was heard. The main force's attack started.

"The attack started!"

Louise firmly primed her lips. Their mission to assist in the main force's attack by creating disturbance… failed.

"It's because of you!"

She shouted at Saito, who ran next to her.

"Wha-what…"

Saito muttered frustrated.

His body felt heavy.

Usually… if he gripped a weapon, his body felt light, like it just grew wings, his arms and legs moved freely… but now it somehow felt like it was bound with elastic.

Saito could not move faster than his usual self, though they still could fight… it was pointless. It was impossible to fight against a mage and his monster pal. They could do nothing but run away.

“Why are you so useless at most crucial moments? Hey!”

The moment when an irritated Louise shouted, an orc group came out of the corner of the street in front.

Trolls from the rear, orcs from the front.

They were completely trapped. There was no way to counterattack.

Rene wiped his lips.

“I wanted to die in the sky at least.”

“Well, I wouldn’t be happy dying from a crash.”

The demi-humans started closing in… but then, looking up into the sky…

Booooooooooom! - the group of orcs ahead blazed up suddenly.

“Dragon knights!”

Rene and others shouted. Saito looked up into the sky as well.

The dragon knight swooped down from the sky, shooting spells and magic breaths, driving the enemy away.

“Our colleagues from the 3rd Company," Rene shouted. Saito looked up into the sky.

Dressed up in white clothes, Julio was riding the first wind dragon. There were ten knights. Five went after trolls, while the other five landed around Saito and the others.

“Quickly, get on!”

Julio shouted. Saito, Rene and the rest hastily jumped onto the dragons. After confirming that all members got on the dragons, Julio lifted up.

“We saw you being chased from above,” Julio explained.

Louise, feeling relieved, patted her chest, and said thanks to Julio.

“Thank you. We survived.”

“Don’t thank us yet.”

Discouraged Louise’s shoulders dropped.

“We… failed the mission. No good…”

Julio pointed to the ground.

“Indeed. There doesn’t seem to be that much of a change in the general situation.”

The power of Tristain-Germania united armies was huge. The Albion army that consisted only of the demi-humans, which, with their large bodies were not able to fight in tight streets, were now retreating.

“But, differently from the scouting mission, the powers used in diversion weren’t of much use…” Julio said and Louise looked down.

“But I cannot understand using such cute girl like you as a ‘tool’. Well, I am not a soldier.”

Saito, sitting behind Louise, intervened.

“You are not a soldier?”

“I am priest, a servant of god, not army.”

Saito ruminated Julio’s words. What a sly guy – he thought, but didn’t voice it out.

“That’s right, I think so too,” Saito nodded.

"Hey Louise! Are you all right? Why aren’t you complaining? Will those generals be angry for us failing the mission?"

However, Louise declared clearly.

“I wish. Seems not everything is possible. ”

Saito, hearing Louise’s words, fell silent, feeling odd again.

The Germania-Tristain united army took over the city of Saxe-Gotha in about one week from the beginning of the attack.

Damage was negligible. Huge demi-humans were not capable of moving well in the urban area suited for humans, and were defeated in even one-on-one battles.

The town was occupied smoothly, due to the residents' cooperation as well. The town residents felt a grudge against Albion's army as it took all their supplies, and one-by-one they cooperated with the allied forces. They informed the allied forces about the buildings where the demi-humans lurked and fought together.

And, at the end of the fourth week of Wynn's month, during day of the week of Ing, in the central plaza of Saxe-Gotha, the town liberation was declared.

All the City Council members of Saxe-Gotha, including the Mayor, the citizens, and the governing staff of the Tristain-Germania united army were gathered.

Going up on the platform constructed at the center of the plaza, General of the united army, Supreme Commander de Poitiers greeted them.

“Thus, I declare the city of Saxe-Gotha liberated. I give the limited self-government right to the Saxe-Gotha City Council under the supervision of Tristain and Germania governments.”

A shout of joy bolted up from residents who were nursing a grudge for the present Albion government.

Among them… Saito was staring at his left-hand.

He gripped Derflinger with his right hand.

Then… the runes slightly shone. He could not feel the same dazzling light as always. It felt as if his batteries started running out.

“Not good, mate.”

Derflinger muttered. Saito nodded.

“It’s in bad condition.”

Since the recent feint mission, he had such a feeling. His body felt heavy, his movements slow. No power.

“It’s over for me, partner.” Saito sighted.

“Don’t say that. Gandálfr's power lies in the strength of the heart. Partner‘s heart was shaken. In other words, you lost your motivation.”

“What?”

“I do not know. Who do you think should know more? Not me, the problem is in your heart, partner. Well, I can guess though...”

Derflinger shook.

“It’s about your noble sweetheart. Haven’t I told you before? Strong emotions are the only source of Gandálfr’s power. Now you started to mistrust your master. You doubt if your master is worth protecting or not. Your emotions were shaken. And the power left.”

“…”

“Mage and familiar. When they trust each other, their power doubles. Legendary ones are not really different.”

Saito thought absent-mindedly.

The way it is now, I cannot fight, right?

An uneasy thought crossed his mind…

But I guess, it doesn’t matter, Saito stole a quick glance at his master.

Louise was having a long talk with the priest from Romalia.

Though Saito saw it, he ignored them. Like when he saw her close to Wardes, a heavy feeling of helplessness covered his shoulders.

What about it… If Louise is taken away by him, you won't be angry? He thought like that. Something buried deep in the heart, started to tremble.

Saito's feelings sunk further when thinking so, he was wrapped by deep helplessness.

The great general on the platform, was giving a fiery speech. As if Albion was already defeated and the victory of his army was doubtless.

These words entered through one ear and left through the other:

For what I am fighting here?

Not long ago, the reason was clear.

For Louise.

Louise is the reason.

The girl, whose sight makes my heart throb…

However, what if it is a girl who rejects my love as well?

What if Louise doesn't want to know me anymore?

If you are not loved, why are you still hanging around?

I do not know.

I do not know?

No… the mind refuses to admit that reason. That feeling.

He could not allow for Louise's attitude to hurt him this much.

Meanwhile, on the other side, Louise, who was in a long talk with Julio, felt absent-minded as well. She looked at Julio. He was a pleasant sight. There wasn’t a girl who would not be attracted to him.

However, she only had her eyes set on her familiar. Occasionally, she stole quick side-glances at him. Saito looked in this direction and looked hurt.

Heee, now isn’t that jealousy?

Familiar’s habit is jealousy now.

Hee, heeeeeeeeee, Louise sang a song of victory in her heart.

Though a smile threatened to break through, she desperately tried to suppress it.

Satisfaction!

Now get a slight grasp of what I was feeling all this time, she muttered in her mind.

“Miss Vallière.”

“Ah, yes! W-what?”

Julio smiled.

“Excuse me. I am being called, I will have to leave you for a moment.”

“Eh?”

Julio elbowed his way through the crowd until he stood in front of the General on the platform. Julio’s pretty face made Saxe-Gotha’s women sigh. "Isn’t this officer handsome?" "He is not an officer but a Priest?" One could hear whispers all around.

It looked like in front of General de Poitiers, not only Julio, but some other nobles were lined up as well.

After confirming that all nobles gathered up in front of him, the general twitched his mustache.

“Eeh, I introduce these brave men to you all. They fought in Saxe-Gotha’s liberation war, like legendary heroes they stood their ground with weapons in their arms. Only by their efforts this marvellous victory was achieved. Thus, as a general authority, I present them with the Medal of White Hair Soul.“

Applause rang.

Next, the officer call the recipient’s names in order.

“De Vineuil Independent Musket Infantry Battalion, 2nd Company Commander, Guiche de Gramont!”

“Y-yes!”

Louise’s mouth dropped.

“Guiche?” as in Guiche, their Academy of Magic classmate?

“He and his men, bravely fought in the streets single-handedly. Moreover, they were the first to clean streets of orcs. The mission was a success, and they freed up more than a few dozen of houses. Applaud him and his men!“

Thunderous applause rang. Guiche, with a wide yet somewhat shy smile, accepted the reward on the neck. A young person, with a similar face to his, came out and clung to Guiche.

"Psst, I heard that's Field Marshal Gramont’s youngest child." "There now is the second son…" "Nooo, could it be 'The Lion’s' child…" rumors flew.

Louise felt strange. *That stupid Guiche is rewarded? Can’t be, I wonder what Montmorency will say when she hears this! Maybe change her opinion a little?*

Apparently, it was an elder brother that clung to him. He didn’t look comfortable while receiving his older brother’s blessings.

Somehow she envied Guiche.

Blessed by a family and acknowledged by them…

Though Louise military achievements were much bigger than Guiche’s, things like this could not be done publicly.

However, once this war ended… when the peace comes… she will tell her family about her large military achievements and loyalty to the mother-country.

Maybe then they will change their opinion about her. But for now, she cannot stumble and take even the slightest credit for her own achievements.

When thinking she remembered Saito’s mistakes. The feint mission sneaking into the town failed thanks to Saito. She watched him, while throwing occasional side glances.

The user of legendary power. A mistake in using them and they got themselves in a pinch yesterday. *Saito should be more prudent*, Louise thought.

Chapter Six: Truce

In Tristainia, capital of Tristain, inside a workroom, a 17 year-old queen closed her eyes in silent prayer.

It was fairly cold in the workroom, where all useless decoration were taken away.

Like in a mausoleum.

In the center of the room, wrapped up in a black dress and covered with a thick veil, Henrietta was kneeling.

In front of her stood a small altar, decorated with a small image of Founder Brimir inside.

Founder Brimir’s image looked like it was a mould for Halkeginia’s advent.

His hands extended wide as if opening the door, an abstract image. It was not easy to see him as a person.

The reason for that was because drawing the Founder's traits in detail was considered disrespectful.

To tell the truth, no one knew the Founder's detailed traits anyway.

While she was silently praying, she heard someone knocking on the door.

“Your Majesty, it’s me.” It was Cardinal Mazarin's voice.

At first she went to grab the wand and recite the "Unlock" spell… but then Henrietta shook her head, placed the wand on the table, stood up and unlocked the door.

Mazarin, entered Henrietta's workroom, and apologized as she puckered up her brows.

“Were you in the middle of work? Forgive my impoliteness.”

“It’s all right,” Henrietta answered.

“I’m not so sure about that. You were praying from dawn till evening. Even if I go somewhere or come back, it's still the same.”

Mazarin watched her coolly. The rumors that, after the Albion invasion, Henrietta prayed all day long were true.

Henrietta tried to explain herself.

“This powerless Queen can do nothing but offer her prayers.”

“Why you are dressed up in black? White suits Your Majesty much better.”

“It’s a war. Many officers and men have fallen. I'm mourning.”

Mazarin, shifting his eyes in embarrassment, reported to Henrietta.

“Yesterday, our allied forces captured Saxe-Gotha. This way, our positions in Londinium were secured.”

“Please send my congratulations to General de Poitiers.”

“Certainly. One more thing…”

“Bad news?”

“That’s right. The allied forces demand the replenishment of their food stocks. It is necessary to send more at once.”

“But, based on the calculations, it'll take another 3 weeks,”

Mazarin said while looking at the report in his hand.

“Saxe-Gotha's resources were emptied. Our army had to give some to the local residents.”

“Are enemies worried about the food as well?”

“No. The purpose is to make our army worried. They foresaw our food shortage and took all the food from the residents.”

“That was cruel.”

“It's a war.”

Henrietta nodded.

“Please make the arrangements.”

“Certainly. However… the state of our treasury is making us more and more worried.”

“And the Minister of Finances?”

“He is conferring with the Gallia ambassador.”

“Gallia?”

“The debt application. It takes a lot of money to fight.”

Henrietta watched her own hand. Then she said in constrained voice.

“We have to win. So, we only have to win. We will return money from Albion’s purse then.”

“Though the day when that purse is obtained seems to be drifting away a little.”

“What?”

Henrietta's face became cloudy. Bad news seemed to favor this side.

“An enemy request for a truce came.”

“Truce? For how long?”

“From the day after tomorrow, until the end of the Advent Festival. It is custom that between Advent Festivals the war also takes a break.”

The Advent Festival continues till the tenth, the biggest festival in Halkeginia. Because the Advent Festival starts during the first day of the new year… it will start after another week or less.

“Fighting will stop for as many as two weeks? No way! Custom or not, such a thing cannot be admitted! Moreover, they can’t be trusted as they shamelessly broke the truce agreement before! They tried to attack the Academy of Magic and take all those children hostages! With such cruel company…”

The Academy of Magic was attacked the day after the invasion fleet had left. Though the students were fortunately safe, repressing it still claimed some lives.

“Although it doesn’t inspire confidence, we don’t have much to choose from. We still need to bring over the food. Until then, the army cannot move.”

“Then attack Londinium for another week! All fleets! All troops! Why do you think we used our trump card – Void?!” Henrietta pressed Mazarin.

The Prime Minister gave some advice to the enraged Queen,

“Your Majesty. Soldiers and generals are also people. Overworking them will not lead you anywhere. Though I understand that you want to reach a conclusion soon… concede on this point.”

Henrietta held herself back and hung her head.

“…I said too much. Please forget about it. You are right about it all.”

After immediately signing the peace treaty, Mazarin stood up, but stopped at the door and turned around.

“Your Majesty, when the war ends, take these black clothes off; they do not suit you.”

Henrietta did not answer.

Mazarin said in a gentle, father-like voice.

“Let it be. It’s enough, mourn only for your mother.”

After the Cardinal left, Henrietta let out a sigh.

“Aah. What I am saying – Louise of Void?”

She muttered in a sad, silent voice.

“…for this goal, I am changing an important person into a tool.”

In Saxe-Gotha, the third day after signing, the truce with the Holy Republic of Albion came into being.

Inside the room of the inn that the allied forces had taken over, Louise sat in front of the fireplace.

In four days the new year would begin. Then, the Founder's Advent festival would start.

Though the war had not ended yet, the town was wrapped in strangely restless atmosphere. No, war may be the reason why they wanted to act so loudly. For the people of Albion it could be the only chance to relax.

The truce period was like a present from the Founder, and Saxe-Gotha's citizens as well as the Tristain and Germanian soldiers, wanted to enjoy themselves to the fullest.

People, dressed up in various colorful clothes, strode cheerfully through the town.

Because Albion, the floating continent, was located 3,000 mails above sea level, winters were sudden and harsh. A skinny person like Louise was exceedingly sensitive to the cold. She experienced Albion’s winter for the first time. All wrapped up in a blanket, she trembled in front of the brightly burning fireplace.

Louise called Saito, who was sitting alone, away from her, doing something.

“It’s cold, isn’t it? Why don’t you come in front of the fireplace?”

There was no answer. Then Louise recalled their recent fight after meeting again.

Louise complained to Saito,

“Hey, Saito. Are you listening to me? It's cold! Are you still worrying about the other day, well I forgave you already! You must stay healthy! It’s a familiar’s responsibility!”

There was no answer again. Saito sat on the side of the bed, his back turned to

Louise, doing something furiously.

“What are you doing?”

Still wrapped up in the blanket, she approached him and saw Saito doing something with a wine bottle’s cork.

“Wha-”

She stretched her neck, trying to see, but he hid it.

“Show me!” Louise pushed Saito aside. Saito showed no resistance.

On top of the small cork was a small cut.

“What?”

Saito kept silently plucking the cork. Leaving small cuts with his fingernails.

Apparently he was killing time by cutting a cork.

…Gloomy. Too gloomy. Such way of killing time looked way too depressing.

“Stop it, already… it's too gloomy…”

Saito quietly muttered,

“Not gloomy.”

“Annoying familiar!”

“Mole.”

Mole. Louise did not like him. She wanted a lofty boy.

He became irritated while thinking about this.

“What mole? Get yourself together!”

She pushed him away, dumbfounded, Saito tumbled,

“Hey, answer me. Hey! Hey, hey! Mole. Mo-mole.”

Rubbing his cheek, Saito stared at Louise.

Louise shrugged uncomfortably and thought angrily. *Yada, wasn’t it like that, when he pushed me down the other day? Get yourself together! Enough! Will that idiot familiar attack me now? Ya-yada* – her body trembled.

That’s why she tried to provoke him. But she could never admit it to the person in question.

However, Saito simply stood up and walked towards the door.

“W-where are you going?!” She asked, disappointed.

“For a walk,” He answered briefly, leaving the room.

Louise came dragging the loose blanket, back to the fireplace, and sat down hugging her knees. Derflinger, who was leaning against the wall, called out to Louise.

“Foolish woman.”

After these words, Louise’s face popped out of the blanket.

“W-what… He’s at fault! He always hesitates…”

“And who do you think is the cause of that?”

“I d-don’t know!”

At a loss, Louise shouted.

“Then I’ll tell you. Partner is completely convinced that you don’t like him.”

Louise bit her lips. “I-it’s natural! He is a familiar, and I am a noble!”

“Really?”

Louise’s face crumbled. Showing her girlish side, Louise sulked.

“H-he is evil. What if I am cold and alone, but he goes with other girls instead…"

“What did you say when he confessed? Instead you talked about something you haven’t witnessed and left, all that housemaid said was ‘unbuttoned’. Thus an affair is doubtful, but you selfishly made your own conclusion.”

“Uuh…”

“Haah, therefore, you flirted with a handsome boy. Don’t you think you overdid it? Anyway, even if it was just an act, you just had to go and make that cruel remark. ‘When riding behind someone, it's better to ride behind a good-looking boy’ was it?”

Louise cast her eyes down.

“When you look at it, that Romalia priest is indeed better looking. One can’t compare the faces. It’s like comparing flying creatures - a fly and a phoenix. Or land walking creatures - a mole and a lion. Or water creatures – a water fly and a swan.”

“…Aren’t you exaggerating?”

“Probably, anyhow, it wasn’t about the face. Partner patiently did not go to the east lands, just to keep you company. To you, he even confessed his ’love’. I guess such ‘loyalties embodiment’ is said to be no good at all. His pathetic self can’t compete in handsomeness with other men. However, partner shows courage in trouble, because he said he loves you…”

Louise listened for five minutes, and blushed furiously. Then, she went to the window and looked outside, looked behind the curtain, opened the closet, sought under the desk, and once she finally confirmed that there was no one in the room to listen, she turned back to the legendary sword.

“Hey, is it true? To whom he said that? How?”

“Partner is very single-minded about that. Though it’s up to you - to believe or not.”

With a blush on her cheeks, Louise became silent.

"Really, it was obvious that partner looked to be in a bad mood.”

Louise bluntly puffed her cheeks.

“I-I got it already. I forgive him! Isn’t it good enough?!”

“Then apologize, tell those little, gentle words.”

“Me? Why?! Apologizing to him…”

“Normally it should be done by both, however now it is your turn to give in, because you were nasty.”

For a while, Louise groaned – Uuuh, auuu, iiiii – regretting.

“I got it already! Only need to apologize! Just apologize!”

She shouted. Was that an apologizing attitude?

However, Derflinger muttered warningly.

“But Partner was seriously sulking this time… he was truly disgusted by you, you know. Such an apology might not be enough.”

Louise started to look troubled.

“Worried?”

“D-don’t be stupid! It will be all right! No one can ask more for an apology!”

“Hmmm.”

Derflinger became silent. Because he wasn’t saying anything for a while, Louise grew impatient.

Eventually Louise became restless. She took up a piece of firewood which was placed near the fireplace and "Piiiiin" started to peel it off.

“Gloomy way of killing time.”

“Shut up! Well, then, tell me! Teach me what do I have to do!”

“Love.”

“Haaa?”

“Say, 'I am in love with Saito'!”

“I can’t say such thing!”

“Do you hate him?”

“I-it’s not that…”

Louise hesitated.

“Well, then, aren’t you in love?"

“I-it’s not that! Anyway, I am saying that I want to say, that I am not saying that I am saying, that I am not in love! Uuuuh! Idiot! Worn-out sword!”

“Haah, if you are like that, then pushing him down is out of the question, right?"

“That’s a splendid idea.”

“Really?”

“Splendid. Stop joking! What kind of idea is that, for a master to push down! Seriously…”

“You won’t push him down?”

“It’s out of the question! Stupid!”

“Aah, but being pushed down by a loving partner, and then embraced tightly, was pleasant, wasn’t it?”

With a scarlet blush on her cheeks, Louise cast her eyes down, and said in a tiny voice.

“…that, c-could you talk about something else?” she asked.

“Then push him down.”

“I-I don’t want to do that! Seriously! I’ll only embarrass myself. Besides it would be hard to push Gandálfr down. Hey.”

“So you say.”

“Anyway, I am La Vallière’s third daughter. I can’t say I love you to such a foolish familiar. Thus, not love. Really. He is the one who loves me, well, I admit, it feels nice. It feels great when he worships me. But it’s not enough! Do you understand?!”

“I understand… you are troubled by obstacles…”

“Anyway, faster, teach me of another way to mend his mood.”

“Make love.”

Louise slowly stood up, and started to cast a spell.

“I won’t blow you up. I’ll melt you. Answer now, without joking. Do you have anything else to offer?”

Derflinger trembled.

“I’m over.”

He muttered.

“What?”

“It’s very hard for me to think. I’m just a sword. Legendary.”

“Because you are legendary, you should be more attentive to remarks.”

“No words are good enough, if you hide your feelings, behind unbreakable pride.”

Louise stepped back, thought for a while, and nodded.

“…What you said, is probably true. Though you are a sword you can understand a human's inner thoughts.”

“It’s because I lived so many years among them. And worked with them. It comes naturally. Now then, speaking of your situation…”

Louise and Derflinger discussed for a while… deciding a strategy.

Saito sat down on a bench in a central plaza of Saxe-Gotha, watching people passing the road. Soldiers of Tristain and Germania, and citizens of Saxe-Gotha all passed with lamplights. The allied forces that occupied the streets walked proudly thrusting out their chests. As it was a truce period, they got drunk, cut loose, and ran after young girls, and ended up being shouted at by noble officers.

However, faces of citizens of Saxe-Gotha, unlike people of defeated countries, did not seem very sad. Sure, they were not pleased by the fact that their town was flooded by additional people. Yet, the aristocratic faction Reconquista, the present political power in Albion, was not in a great favor here.

Besides, because they delivered food, the allied forces seemed to be accepted as a liberation army.

Though the rampart was partially destroyed, damage to the urban area was avoided as much as possible, so there were hardly any loses for the town and citizens. Considering the war's end and the start of the anticipated Advent Festival, citizens were smiling broadly.

“Haah,” Saito let out a sigh.

Within this happy town, the only dark face is mine.

Then he stared at the rune on his left hand.

Haa, the power passed on a big load to me, he thought. *When this war ends, I will surely go to the eastern lands. Louise will not need me anymore…*

Thinking this way, he grew even more lonely. And nostalgia hit him again. Saito recalled his hometown in the different world. In the alien world… in the foreign town of the foreign country that he did not get used to, nostalgia filled his chest

suddenly.

Being wrapped up in such painful feelings… Saito was called from the back.

“Saito!”

Saito, for a moment could not recognize whose voice it was. That voice shouldn’t be here on this street.

The next moment, arms wrapped up tightly around Saito from the back, and he was pushed to the ground.

“Yaaan, being able to meet so soon! Feels great! I'm so happy!”

Barely thinking, he turned around, just to see a shining Siesta’s face, with a broad smile.

“S-Siesta? Why?”

Saito panicked. Why is Siesta here? This is Albion, a continent on a cloud. It’s not the place for the Academy of Magic’s maid Siesta to be in.

“Hmmm? Who did Siesta meet here?”

A deep voice came from the back. It sounded sweetened.

“Manager Scarron?”

Manager Scarron was an effeminate man, dressed up in tight leather clothes. He managed the “Charming Faries” inn where Saito and Louise worked one summer. And next to him was Scarron’s daughter Jessica. Saito stared at them all with widely opened eyes.

“Consolation Corps?”

In a café facing the plaza, Saito asked loudly. Slurping the beer, a smiling Scarron responded, while puckering up his brows,

“That's riiight! The reason for that is that additional food needed to be sent, thus the Consolation Corps was organized! To go to Albion…”

Scarron looked at the piling up dishes and shook his head.

“The dishes are horrible! Only beer to drink! Women too thin! What a notorious place!”

Indeed, if you looked around the plaza, shops serving wine could not be found, only tea and beer. The Albion people did not drink wine, Scarron explained, plainly puckering up his brows.

“Really! Such an unpalatable beer is the same as drinking phlegm; Tristainian people with taste would never drink this! Therefore, Tristanian inns can earn much from such business trips. I want to open White Arrow’s Inn here. This way 'Charming Fairies' inn would establish next to royal families! Aaah, the honor!”

Scarron wiggled his body. Girls, brought from the inn, seconded him in joyful chorus.

“Honor! Mi mademoiselle!”

Scarron rose up above the table. Saito almost burst into tears.

“Is Saito a soldier? Why did you come to Albion?”

“No, I’m not a soldier…”

“Let it out. Mi mademoiselle is a man, he’ll understand.”

Mi mademoiselle being a man still needs to be confirmed, Saito thought while nodding vaguely.

Then he remembered Siesta, sitting next to him and smiling broadly.

“But, why did Siesta come along?” He asked.

“She’s a relative.”

Frightened to death, Saito stared at Scarron. Could someone as sweet as Siesta be Scarron’s relative?

“M-manager’s..?”

“Yes. From the mother's side…”

Siesta muttered shamefully.

“Could it be that the tavern where Saito worked during this year's summer…”

“He worked in it. That’s how we got acquainted.”

Jessica explained. Then Jessica looked at Saito across the table.

“Siesta is my cousin. You know each other, right?”

Indeed, they both had black hair. Which was unusual in this world.

Siesta hesitated before saying.

“As soon as Saito left, the school was attacked by an Albion burglar.”

"Eh? Eeh?! Eh?”

Saito was surprised by the topic. Due to consideration of the troop morale, the news about their own country hardly ever reached the battlefield.

“We did not understand what was happening when the lodging-house shook… There was a big uproar…a few died.”

Siesta said with a sad face.

Saito was worried about the people left in the school. Were there people that he knew included on the "dead people" list?

“Who became victims?’

“As commoners, we were not told about the details…” Siesta said apologetically.

What if it is a person I know, Saito thought. Though it is sad when someone dies, it is a lot more saddening when it happens to a person one knows.

“And the school has been closed until the war ends. I thought of what to do and

decided to help Uncle with his inn.”

“Sie-chan worked there in the past.”

“When I got to the inn, I saw Uncle Scarron and Jessica's packing luggage together… They explained that they were going to Albion.”

“That’s why you decided to go along?”

When Saito said so, Siesta nodded with a blush.

“Ye-yeah… and…”

“And?”

“I thought I would be able to meet S-Saito here…”

Jessica leaned over, scrutinizing the pair.

“Eh? What? Siesta and Saito are intimate? I was certain it was Louise…”

After Jessica’s words, Siesta’s eyes shone.

“Is Miss Vallière doing fine?”

“Y-yes,” Saito nodded.

Uncomfortable silence followed.

Grinning, Jessica approached Saito.

“So you are still together. Sorry, I misunderstood.”

"No, not particularly …” Saito muttered, feeling mixed emotions.

“Aaah, Louise is here as well? Then let's go and greet her,” Scarron said while fiddling with his fingernails.

Meanwhile, Louise, under the guidance of Derflinger, developed Operation “Mend Saito’s Mood”.

Following Derflinger’s instructions, Louise bought various materials from the inn's shop.

“This! You must be joking!”

Louise screamed at the sword.

“It’s not a joke. It’s a proper apology to my partner.”

Derflinger said in a serious voice.

“But why as an animal?! I’m a noble, a noble! Understand?!”

“Because of your high-handed status, how else you are going to apologize?”

“So you think turning into a familiar helps?!”

“That’s right. It’s a great strategy. ‘Saito, I’m sorry for my malicious remarks. For today, I’ll be your familiar.’”

Derflinger said, imitating Louise’s voice.

“If you were to say ‘Please’ in such state, then maybe partner, as he is rather simple, would forgive all your crimes?”

Louise shook her head and said.

“Ouu, but not looking like this animal.”

“Huu”

“Why a black cat?!”

“A black cat is the most popular familiar. Therefore, a black cat is fitting. It is a comprehensible. What is important is comprehension.”

Louise's cheeks blushed, while she stared at the black cat costume material, lined up in front of her.

“Well at least I will make these parts by myself.”

Louise took out the sewing set that she borrowed from the inn, and from fur, leather, and strings started making "black cat's clothes", as Derflinger said.

While grappling with the fur for a while…she completed the black cat’s clothes. Though Louise had zero talent in sewing, somehow she still managed to make such simplistic shapes.

Since now, the clothes were completed, Louise went near the mirror, to witness the destructive power of the black cat’s costume.

“W-what’s this?! With such clothes I would embarrass myself before everyone!”

“It suits you well,” Derflinger said in a composed voice.

“Why ears?!”

Louise shouted while pointing to the object on her head, which imitated cat’s ears. It was also cut out from black fur and attached to the top of her head.

“It looks nice.”

“But what about these clothes! Lewd! It’s lewd!”

Trembling, Louise pointed at her image in the mirror. In short, only the key parts of her body were covered with black fur.

Tight black-fur cloth was rolled around her breasts. She wore furry panties too. And, like socks, bits of fur were placed around her ankles.

The tail, made from remaining material, ran down her buttocks.

“No, every part of your black cat costume is splendid.” Derflinger said like it was somebody else's problem.

“What! Just a look at it makes one's head boil!”

Louise said in a painful voice. She now regretted listening to the sword.

“No, your body is young, it starts to originate a wild charm. Partner will be

trounced.”

Louise suddenly stopped.

“This is flirty attire, right? Partner will instantly jump on it.”

“N-not of that sort. Stop joking.” While saying so, Louise began making poses in front of the mirror. Not fully convinced.

Fidgeting her fingers hesitatingly, she bent over tilting her head, then, with both hands on the floor, she turned around and tried out a sobbing pose.

“What? You want to be jumped on?”

“N-no! T-trying out, I’m just trying out! Honestly! I just feel uneasy!"

Eventually Louise became pleased with the pose.

“Ah, it’s nice. Cute.”

She said. And received an agreement from Derflinger.

“Good. Stick with it.”

However, once calming herself down, her embarrassment kicked in again.

“I-it’s impossible after all! Impossible!”

“This pose is just to raise his spirit, that’s all.”

“Even so, hey… But somewhat, hey… I, a duke’s daughter… legendary… As expected… I can’t do such a thing. Don’t feel like it.”

“I tell you. Because of you partner is sulking.”

“Uuh…”

“Just do it for one single day. Use a woman’s important charms. Yes.”

“…But.”

Derflinger used the trump card.

“Do you want to lose to that maid?”

Louise’s eyebrows shot up.

“What? Lose to whom?”

“No, nothing to worry about! As expected from ‘Void’!

“It won’t happen. That m-maid will be the one to lose.”

At that moment. The doorknob of the room turned.

“Aaah, partner came back.”

Louise breathed deeply, in-and-out, stood up in front of the door.

“Remember. Noble’s daughter. Leave your pride behind, be charming. All right?”

“I-I know!”

The next moment, the door swung open.

Louise blushed, squeezing her eyes shut, bent, forced herself to not cover her breasts with her hands, placed the thumb of her left hand under her lips, put her right hand on her hips, and screamed out the words previously decided with Derflinger.

“Y-y-y-you are my master for today!”

Then… Louise waited for her partner's reaction.

However, there was no answer. It felt like eternity.

What?! Through? Rejected? The heat of anger boiled in Louise's head.

“Say something! I won’t wait forever!”

Then, Louise opened her eyes… however it wasn’t the sight of Saito that greeted her eyes.

“M-m-m-miss Vallière?”

The one who stood there was a pale-faced, trembling Siesta.

“Ara, Louise. What is this costume?”

“Pu. Pupu. When did you turn into cat?”

It wasn’t just Siesta. There was Scarron and Jessica too. Saito stuck his head out from behind his friends.

“Wait. Brought sake. Mmm? Why didn't anyone enter the room?”

Then Saito noticed Louise dressed up in black cat’s clothes.

“Wh-what’s the meaning of this? You…”

Louise screamed.

“Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!”

“Louise is so cute,” Scarron muttered, sitting on a chair.

“Pu. Pupu. Pupupu,” Jessica held her mouth, desperately trying to suppress her

laughter.

Frowning Siesta watched the chipped ball of fur that Louise used.

Louise hid herself behind the covers, and did not get out from the bed.

Although everything calmed down, there was no reply.

Confused Saito asked Derflinger.

“Wha-what happened?”

“Well, that masterpiece…”

After his words, the blanket flew up, Louise, who completely forgot about her black cat’s clothes she was wearing, flew out of the bed, kicked the sword and silently returned back to the bed.

Siesta stared at Louise.

Saito looked doubtful.

Jessica looked out of the window.

“Snow started to fall, getting cold.” She muttered.

“An Advent Festival of snow… waah, how romantic,” Scarron wiggled his body.

Chapter Seven: The Reason To Fight

Full-bloomed fireworks went up, illuminating the night sky.

From under the many tents placed in Saxe-Gotha's main plaza, people shouted with joy.

Because the Allied Forces were stationed here, the city was filled up with almost twice as many tents. There were only a limited number of lodging houses that soldiers could rent. Merchants came from various places to sell soldiers a variety of things. The city of Saxe-Gotha was wrapped in an unprecedented vigor.

And, heralding the beginning of the month of Yara, today was twice as vigorous than the first day of the first week.

The biggest festival in Halkeginia, the Advent Festival, started. For ten days starting today, one could drink, sing, and cause a fuss every day.

Louise and Saito drank alcohol in the grand tent of the "Charming Fairies" inn, which was opened in the plaza.

Surrounding Rene, there was everyone from the 2nd Dragon Knight Squadron. Every main officer, including Guiche, could have been seen in here as well. Both senior military officers and soldiers were prohibited from eating and drinking in the inns of Saxe-Gotha. They would get drunk, causing the local residents trouble – thus it was easier to monitor them if they were all held together. Because of that, the inn, which made a business trip from Tristain, was full.

After the black cat clothes were seen, Louise did not talk at all except when necessary. She was very embarrassed. She silently sipped her drink alone.

Because Louise was weak to alcohol, only a little bit of wine was poured in her glass. The rest of her drink consisted of fruit juices, honey, and water. She kept on drinking it little by little. Still, her face was already red.

She was casting glances at Saito through the corner of her eyes.

Saito was drinking with the Rene party as well as Guiche, whom he met again a little while ago. Differently from that time with Louise, he was relatively happy. Seeing that, Louise poured in more wine.

A bleary-eyed Louise rose her glass.

“Seconds!”

Louise saw a waitress running up to her, turned her face away, and tried to call another one.

“Someone serve me. Someone.”

“Place your order,” Siesta called out to Louise with a calm expression.

“I didn’t call you.”

Louise glared at Siesta. And then, muttered,

"Running around… like an idiot.”

Siesta, keeping on a cheerful face, said,

“I'll do extra, if you dress in a black cat’s suit.”

Louise blushed. Siesta quietly drew her face to Louise’s, and murmured, while smiling,

“You are my master for today.”

Louise jumped up, shaking.

But then she had a second thought. *There’s no time to banter with that maid. Besides, I know the outcome of this war anyway. I’ll tell her* ***that****.* She chuckled in her mind. Louise put on a shy face and muttered,

“I-I was confessed to.”

Siesta’s eyebrows shot up. Louise did not miss her love rival’s reaction. That’s

because Louise was a girl. *She doesn't have what I do. I won, after all!* Louise became happy, and in order to sweeten her victory, she pressed Siesta on.

"That's right. He said he favors me. 'What to do I wonder, I cannot stop thinking of you,' he said. Really, such an impertinent familiar."

Siesta listened to it with a smile.

"Heee. I am glad to hear that," she said, though her eyes were not smiling at all.

"Besides, he pushed me down. Of course, I did not permit it! I mean, I do not like things like that. It's not natural!"

"Flirting but not selling is repulsive."

Siesta said. Louise caught a glance at her forehead and answered back.

"Not you."

Two people continued to stare at each other.

At that moment… a muted sound of something hitting the tent was heard.

"Mmm?"

"Look snow! Snow!" voices rang outside.

Indeed, through the entrance of the tent, one could see it snowing..

"Advent Festival of Snow…" Louise muttered.

"I dreamed of the Advent Festival of Snow…" Siesta murmured with an enchanted expression.

"Really?"

"Yes. In Tarbes, it is warm even during the winter. Without too much snow…"

With her eyes sparkling like child's, Siesta watched the snow outside the tent.

Then Siesta noticed Louise looking at her. The pair looked at each other,

blushing. Then returned back to watching the snow.

Louise said, hiding her awkwardness,

“…It is calm somehow. Maybe we should also make a truce for the Advent Festival.”

“Right.”

“Sit here.”

Louise urged Siesta to sit. Yes, Siesta sat demurely next to Louise with a nod.

Accepting Louise’s pre-offered drink, Siesta bowed.

“Cheers!”

Feeling strange, the pair let their cups clink.

“Nice,” Siesta said, with a blush from the alcohol on her cheeks.

“Feels like really being a noble.”

They watched the snow falling through the opening of the tent by the snow.

“Beautiful… Snow covering the buildings… like sugar,” Siesta muttered.

“Well...”

“Though it’s such a beautiful land, why is there a war…?”

Siesta said, while looking at Louise.

“S-sorry… I am not blaming Miss Vallière… I know you work hard for the country.”

Louise cast her eyes down.

Siesta muttered, staring at the wine in the bottom of her glass,

“… To tell you the truth, I hate this war. Many people die. For what reason?”

“For what reason?”

“Why do you fight? Father… said that the reason is money. Capturing an enemy country can also be beneficial for a ruler to establish one's self. Is that it? Do you kill others for such reason?”

Louise thought. It might be true considering surrounding ministers. However, Henrietta was different. Because of the time they both spent together during their childhood, Louise understood her well. For Henrietta, this war was about revenge. To defeat a hateful enemy who killed a beloved person. This was the

only intent in Henrietta’s mind.

Siesta asked Louise, who was lost in thought,

“Why is Miss Vallière fighting?”

“Me?”

“That’s right.”

Is it because I wanted to help Henrietta? A little bit. But not really that.

For Louise, this fight…

Seeing Louise being silent, Siesta looked down.

“I’m sorry. Its not a thing for me to ask about, but…”

At that moment… a loud yell coming from Saito’s table could be heard.

“Really! Don’t be a fool!”

Louise and Siesta, startled by the voice, turned around.

“Ha! Who is a fool?! What is so foolish about it?!”

Guiche roared, while standing up.

Saito also stood up and pointed his finger at Guiche.

“What are you telling me?! You are just doing it to score some points in Montmorency’s eyes. Fool! If you would die, Monmon would be really sad!”

“A-are you insulting my actions?!”

Guiche brandished his artificial rose.

Seems like it was a quarrel. Rene, who was drinking with them, said,

“Yeah, because you are a commoner, pride does not matter for you, but it is different for us.”

Saito stared at Rene and said,

“Honor this, honor that – it's just foolishness. Didn’t your Dragon Knight unit die once already? Fear it a little! It’s weird! Aren’t you afraid of dying for honor? That’s stupid. Only fools think that way. Honor? It’s not worth dying for. Such a thing that you are doing – I think it’s silly.”

“Saito!”

At that moment… Saito’s name was suddenly shouted. It wasn’t Rene or Guiche. It was Louise, who stood there, shaking in anger.

Saito slowly turned towards Louise.

“What?”

“You, apologize. Apologize to Guiche and Rene!”

“Whaat?”

“Insulting ‘honor’ cannot be permitted.”

Louise said while trembling.

And Saito was the reason behind that.

I am being misunderstood.…The things she thought to be important, had completely no importance to Saito, which made her annoyed.

Because of Saito’s fight… she completely forgot about her bad mood. Only Saito’s "Failed a mission, so what?" remark came into her mind right now.

Saito answered back in an angry voice,

“The ones that you defend are them and not me?”

“Defend, what are you talking about? To me, honor is more important than life. If I were to lose it, I would not be a noble anymore. And if I am not a noble, then I am not me, either. That’s why I can’t stand remarks denying honor right in front of me.”

Louise said clearly.

On the other hand, Saito noticed it, too.

Saito knew that from the look of Louise’s eyes. When she was almost crushed by Fouquet’s golem, Louise showed the same expression as well.

At that time, Louise shouted “I will not run away from the enemy, because I am a noble!”

At that time, he thought such a Louise to be marvelous, but it was different now.

Aah, Saito understood.

He remembered Louise’s recent words.

“A death is sad, however… They died with honor … Honor… They died for a great victory. Therefore, don’t feel sorry for them.”

Saito understood the true reason why he was sulky. Julio wasn’t the reason that separated them.

For Louise, was this duty… this word "honor" really that important? Because he felt so, he got depressed so much.

Therefore, he made remarks about Guiche a little while ago.

What is it?

Is this honor so important?

“Then, you…”

Saito stared at Louise.

“You?"

“If you were ordered to die, would you die like these unreasonable guys?”

Saito said, pointing at Rene and others.

Louise bit her lip.

“Isn’t it unreasonable? Such impertinent…” Louise interrupted before he could finish,

“Die. I would.”

Her voice trembled.

“You…”

Saito was shocked. Louise, completely composed, said,

“F-for the Princess and for the mother country. If ordered, I would give it away with pleasure.”

This Louise made Saito clink.

She said she would be ready to die so thoughtlessly.

And what about their teacher's, Colbert, letter. To be accustomed to death because of war! Seeing people die, the words resounded.

It all came back now. *Really, is honor more important than us?*

Saito pressed Louise on.

“Then what about me?”

“Heh?”

“If you are ordered to die, then should I die as well?”

Louise, looking perplexed, muttered, misunderstanding,

“Wh-what… are you so afraid of death?”

“What are yo-“

“Coward! Everyone is ready to die, when agreeing to coming here!”

“Am I determined? Wasn’t I brought here by force as your attendant?”

“Then why haven’t you said so?!”

“I haven’t been given time to think! It was just – go here, go there, all the time!”

The two people shouted at each other in angry voices. People, eating and drinking within the tent, dumbfounded, watched the exchange of words between them.

“That… could you ease up little now?” Rene, standing next to Guiche, finally brought Louise back to her senses.

She shook her head, and calmly informed Saito.

“Well… it’s embarrassing. Now, Saito, return to your room and get some rest. After that, we can calmly clear things out… This kind of anger won’t solve anything.”

What… the talk isn’t over, and yet, she still feels uneasy in front of others?

The moment he thought so…Saito realized one more thing.

He did not want to think about it for a long time… The distance felt between him and Louise, the true reason behind this sense of incompatibility…

Could it be what Louise thinks of me?

He thought that this question and the sense of distance between them was related.

Generals… used Louise’s “Void” as a tool…

I am only a “tool” for Louise as well.

The legendary familiar, Gandálfr.

The purpose of his existence was only to defend the master while he or she cast a spell…

In other words, I am an important tool on her road of defending honor…

Then, she surely needs to take care of his mood. Giving an occasional touch, as a reward.

“Then you are the same as those generals.”

Saito muttered.

“Ha! That, what are you saying…”

“I am just a ‘tool’, right? A familiar.”

Then he thrust Louise aside and walked out of the tent.

“Hey, wait!” she shouted, but Saito did not stop.

Siesta, who was sitting near by, stood up and ran after Saito. Then Louise angrily grabbed the jar of wine and poured her glass full, instead of honey and fruit juice, and drank it all in one gulp.

Saito meandered through the snowing city. Though it was called an old town, the stones were perfectly shaped, without cracks or misses. Though it was hard to believe, the city stayed the same for thousands of years, because the "Fixation" spell was placed on it a long time ago.

It was a white city, because of the snow. The walls around the city and ramparts were all covered with scattering white snow that danced in the sky.

And so he passed through such a burningly, white street, when, he was called to from behind.

“Saito-san.”

Turning around, he saw a sad Siesta standing there. She wore black clothes and an apron designed different from the one seen at the Academy of Magic. The design of her dress had a slightly revealing neckline as well. This could be the preference of the "Charming Fairies" inn.

“Siesta.”

Siesta ran up to Saito and clasped his hand.

“S-s…”

With a blush on her cheeks, she hesitatingly tried to say something.

“S?”

“S-snowing, y-you’ll catch cold…”

“Cold? Not really…”

When he said so, Siesta started to weep.

“It’s bad. You will catch a bad cold…”

The passers-by watched the couple with curious expressions. Saito panicked.

“S-Siesta… T-that…”

“Making a girl cry! Lady-killer!”

“What, going after a country girl?”

People on the street started hooting.

Saito was embarrassed.

“Siesta, for now, let’s keep going…”

He began to walk while holding the crying Siesta’s shoulder.

Since they could not return to the room rented by Louise or to the “Charming Fairies” inn, Saito and Siesta had to rent a room at a distant inn instead. In the city that was overflowing with soldiers and merchants, it was very hard to find

an empty room, but somehow, in the basement of one tattered tavern, they were able to find a room and entered it.

“Taking one écu for such a shabby room.”

Saito complained while taking a seat on the bed. It was dim because the room was windowless. Though Siesta was still crying badly, she stopped once Saito gently patted her head.

“I'm sorry,”

Siesta said while biting her lower lip.

“What’s wrong?”

Saito asked.

“Poor Saito–san… Though he works hard, he gets such cold words…It is very saddening…”

“It’s all right.”

Saito said, in hopes of lightening up the mood for a moment.

Siesta started to shiver.

The unheated room grew colder. Saito stood up and threw a few pieces of firewood into the fireplace. They were given some when booking the room. Other heating conveniences were not invented in Halkeginia yet. He stared blowing to make the firewood burn more… and was silently hugged by Siesta from behind. Instinctively, he held his breath.

“I’m sorry…” Siesta said in tearful voice.

“Eh? No, it’s okay… I had no use for the money anyway…”

He thought she was grateful about booking the room, but he was wrong.

“Running off to such a place… is troublesome.”

Siesta tightened her hug.

The fire spread upon the firewood… burning brightly. The room was half way underground, so the window still provided some of the light up. Facing towards the street, one could see feet of passers-by.

“Am I a nuisance?”

“Not at all. Feels very good.”

Siesta muttered in a weeping voice again,

“Even so, isn’t this a war? If something happened to Saito-san, I, I… I hated not being able to see you again, so I decided to come. Thus, I came with Jessica and Uncle to Albion…”

While speaking, she gave in to her emotions.

Siesta began to weep raggedly again.

“I wanted to see you so much. And I am happy to see you, yet I cannot express myself. When speaking, I am blathering about various, non-important things. Terrible.”

Siesta pressed her cheek, wet from tears, against his back.

“Well…”

“…I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry for crying.” Siesta muttered over and over again.

Saito turned around, taking off Siesta's hand and patting her head with his left hand and wiping away the tears with the fingers of his right.

“Poor Saito-san. Brought from another world, yet keeps working hard without complaints. Cruel. It is so cruel. M-my important person… used as a tool…”

Saying so, while sobbing, Siesta looked at Saito’s face. Then, suddenly, Siesta tried to bring her lips close to his… but once he noticed what she was attempting to do, he tried to pull away.

But Saito could not pull his hand from her cheek. *I do not want to separate,* he

thought.

Siesta, noticing the hesitation of Saito's hand, wrapped her arms around Saito's neck and quickly kissed him.

Being the first time that Siesta kissed him, her lips felt warm. *Like everything about Siesta – warm and soft. Just like that bread that she allowed me to eat in the kitchen.*

Siesta pulled away for a moment and looked at Saito's face through moistened eyes.

And then, she pressed her lips fiercely again. Using her body weight, Siesta pinned Saito to the floor.

Siesta’s black hair looked slightly red from the fireplace. Her cheeks glowed as well.

She was a gentle girl who was always near.

Siesta, with a determined look in her eyes, pushed back the black hood and tried to remove her robe completely.

He wanted to say, “W-wait,” but was silenced by the kiss.

The kiss was both sweet and fierce at the same time. While blushing, Siesta placed a hand on her breasts. Leaning herself upon him, Siesta traced Saito’s lips with her own over and over again.

Slightly separating their lips, she muttered.

“I love you.”

All lit up by the burning flames, Siesta looked pretty and wild, she was very tempting. Even when they shared a bath together, she did not look as tempting.

Love and kisses must be what made her so tempting.

Capturing like a flame it makes a girl look better.

Siesta herself was not aware of her coquettish charms.

Still, not noticing that Saito stiffened, Siesta puckered up her lips.

“Jessica said – when you meet a boy that you like, you will do everything for him. I think it might be true, as right now I am ready to do everything.”

“T-t-that’s not…”

Saito tried to squeeze words out of his seemingly dry throat.

“So, please touch me.”

Because of the way she was clasping hands, the valley of her breasts peeping out of her black dress was clearly visible, Saito turned his face away. Siesta gave a confused look.

“Do you hate it?”

She asked, Saito shook his head.

“It isn’t so. It isn’t why.”

Saito said in a tensed voice. He was a healthy boy. It was hard to endure. Almost dead-hard. Such a cute Siesta embracing him tightly… he wanted to make her his. But at the same time… he thought that it would be a lie. He would be lying about something important.

Therefore, Saito shook his head.

“... Saying that, it would feel like a lie.”

“A lie?"

“Yes. Because Siesta is an important person to me… That’s why that… I am not saying that…” he started stammering incoherently.

Did it reach her, what he wanted to say?

Siesta thought for a moment… and then smiled.

“Saito-san, remember?”

“…Eh?”

“In Tarbes… some time ago. You promised to take me back to the other world where you came from.”

“…Yes.”

“What you said that time was not a lie, because I still believe it.”

“Siesta.”

“Then I will wait. It will not be a lie when your feelings will grow… Though it might never happen… I’ll wait. Then…I…”

Saying that, Siesta was so lovable that Saito couldn’t help himself and embraced her tightly.

Siesta looked at Saito with puppy eyes and said,

“For only tonight. Hug me tightly…and kiss me. Is it all right? Would it also be a lie?"

“About the k-kiss...”

“Then skip the kiss part.”

Because there was no need to hold himself back now, he embraced her.

Such words of Siesta, should not be said when being rejected. When Siesta reposed herself on the bed, Saito looked down at her. There were no sign of tears on her face. Just a simple melancholy.

Then Saito embraced the girl, who said that she loves him, tightly.

Siesta had a very nice aura around her. Different from Louise, it was tender, it was an aura of a tender girl. Saito, holding her firmly, spoke about everything and nothing.

About being lost in a forest as a kid.

About his favorite syrup for the pancakes.

About taking a whole-day nap during the holidays.

When he ran out of topics, Siesta piled up her lips.

Then… Siesta passed a small jar to Saito.

“What is it?”

“Magical medicine. I bought it with my saved money. ‘Sleeping pills.’”

“Sleeping pills?”

“Right. If you were to drink those with wine, you would fall into a deep sleep.”

“I can fall asleep without those things.”

He said, but Siesta shook her head.

“I did not buy it for Saito-san.”

“Then why?”

Siesta lowered her voice.

“It’s for, for Miss Vallière… if she would make Saito-san to do something dangerous… then make her drink it and escape while she’s asleep.”

Saito laughed spontaneously.

“Muu… stop laughing already… I am serious!”

“Well, I do not think it's dangerous," Saito said.

The war is a winning battle. Scaring the enemy's main force and making them shut themselves up in the capital without going out… it is said that there should be a lot of soldiers who could revolt, too. It was an easy victory for the generals, the officers, the soldiers – for everyone.

“I hear that now we just have to take down Londinium. Everybody is saying that the enemy has lost their morale so the war will end quickly.”

Though Louise had been strangely sent to a dangerous duty… since they failed the other day, there might be no more of that. *Besides… Louise does not expect much from me either. So, I do not think that generals will entrust us with an important assignment again.*

“But I am worried. My younger brother… my younger brother will also go to the war soon. My brother also said not to worry. But I am worried. And if I start thinking about Saito-san, I become worried too. I can’t leave while being so worried…”

Siesta looked like she was about to burst into tears again.

“Everything is all right.”

“…I have a bad premonition. If something not good were to happen to Saito-san, then I, I…”

Saito firmly held Siesta close.

“Saito-san…”

“Siesta, calm down. It’s all right. Everything is all right. When you return back to the school, please make the stew for me again.”

Siesta nodded "Yes" and smiled.

The flame of the fireplace trembled gently.

The snow was falling outside, reflected in the moonlight it bathed the world in silver light

“…An argent Advent Festival,” Siesta said.

“What is this festival enshrining?”

“Founder Brimir - the festival celebrates the day when he landed on this ground.”

“But today marks… the start of a new year. Does this festival enshrine New Year's as well?”

“Indeed. The day when Founder Brimir landed on this ground became New Year's Day, too.”

He remembered Louise.

The user of the Founder’s element "Void"…

Why such great magic power was given to a human… was it a blessing or a curse, contemplated Saito.

In her own rented room, with a blanket over her head, Louise was waiting for her familiar’s return. Though it was the middle of the night… Saito was not returning.

Outside the window… the snow stopped falling a while ago…

Thick layers of snow, illuminated by the two moons, dyed the whole city silver.

The thought of the two people together watching this beautiful scenery right now made her body burn with jealousy.

“Muu, I don’t want to know,” she muttered, hugging her knees.

I can’t permit Saito to hurt me this much.

Knock knock someone knocked against the room doors. *He came back,* she lifted her head. Her face softened.

However… it wasn’t Saito’s voice that came from the other side of the door.

“It’s me, Miss Vallière. Can I come in?”

It was Romalia’s priest, Julio’s voice.

“Did something happen? It’s midnight already.”

“I have to talk with you about something.”

Once the door was opened, the handsome Julio was standing there with a smile on his face.

When entering the room, Julio gracefully bowed.

“Something to talk about?”

Julio silently took Louise's hand. Her body started to tremble spontaneously.

“Relax. I won’t do anything strange. The royal ring is what interests me.”

Louise looked doubtful… but, deciding not to refuse, she thrust her finger out.

On the ring finger of the right hand, the Ruby of Water, given by Henrietta, started to shine. A legendary ring, used to read the Founder's Prayer Book…

“Beautiful blue… Have you wondered?”

Louise tilted her head. What was he talking about?

“Why is it a blue ruby?”

“That…” Louise faltered. Once asked about, it indeed was mysterious.

“It is called ‘The Ruby of Water’ gem, I know.”

Startled, Louise looked at Julio.

“Julio, you…”

“The Ruby of Water is vivid blue, the Ruby of Wind is transparent, the Ruby of Earth is brown…”

Louise held up her wand.

“Who are you?”

“I’m a priest. Really, just a priest of Romalia. The Pope's messenger. Well, I‘ll continue the lecture. The legendary gems are called rubies... even though they are not really red. It‘s because they are said to be made from the Founder's blood. However, it is unknown if it‘s true or not.”

“It’s very detailed.”

“Aah. We study a lot of things for divine purposes in Romalia. One with nature and learning. It makes me be me. The gems were given to Halkeginia a long,

long time ago... Water to Tristain, Wind to Albion, Earth to Galia... and Fire to Romalia.”

“Eh?”

“I’m searching for Romalia’s Ruby of Fire. As the name suggests, it’s a red gem that looks like fire. There is a strange story concerning this ruby. It was stolen from Romalia… and rumors said that Tristain had a hand in it. Have you heard about it?”

Louise shook her head. She never saw nor heard about such thing.

“You are not lying?”

“Yes. I cannot stand lying.”

“Then I guess that’s the way it is.”

Julio gave up suddenly and sat on the bed.

“Are there more stories left to tell?”

“Your story.”

“My story?”

“I'm very interested.”

He gave a charming smile. A smile that made every girl helpless. However, Louise was not in a mood today and did not want to see that handsome smile at all.

“This late? I’m sleepy.”

“We could sleep together.”

Such an over confident attitude ticked Louise off.

“It’s arrogant.”

“Julio Cesar is not my real name. It’s a name of an ancient great king of

Romalia.”

“Why did you take the name?”

“I was abandoned. I grew up in an orphanage. I was a leader among other kids, therefore, I was nicknamed after the great king Julio Cesar. Because it was troublesome, I introduced myself this way as well. Arrogance is inborn.”

“Will you leave already?”

Julio stood up.

“Surely, sooner or later… You will be interested in me. I promise.”

Louise pointed to the door. After bowing, Julio left the room.

“…Why are all men so arrogant?”

Louise laid in bed, waiting for her familiar to return.

However, Saito did not come back.

Chapter Eight: King Of Gallia

The Kingdom of Gallia - the large country that had the highest population in Halkeginia. The population was about 15 million people. Gallia was an advanced country in magic… there were a lot of nobles too. Its capital, Lutèce, was the biggest city in all Halkeginia.

The city was positioned on the banks of Shire River that disgorged into the ocean. The so called “Old Town” developed significantly. However, the political center of Lutèce was not located there now.

It was located on the left bank of the river, rather away from the city, in the huge palace of Versailles. Not only was the palace elegant and complex, but so was the garden of Versailles, creating various shaped lines in front of the building.

This garden and building were expanded by the hands of the architects and the gardening masters invited from all over the world. All the growing cultures were used to change the outlook of Versailles.

Inside Versailles' palace, there was a building of particularly great dimensions. The royal family of Gallia had unusual blue hair color. In order to imitate this hair color, the building called the Grand Troyes was made from blue bricks.

In that Grand Troyes lived a man who had control over the 15 million lives in Gallia’s kingdom.

He was Joseph – King of Gallia.

His blue hair and blue beard framed his face, making it look breathtakingly beautiful. Tall and muscular he looked like a living statue. Though he was 45 years of age, he looked youthful in every way as if only hitting 30.

This beautiful face of a handsome man had a strange look on it.

Surrounded by two pages, he looked rather bizarre.

A lady’s voice came from the other side of the damask.

“Your Majesty…Your Majesty! The one which you looked for was found and came!”

Joseph elbowed his way towards the entrance in the room. A beautiful lady stood there surrounded by the blooming roses. Joseph’s face started to glow.

“Mrs. Molliere! Mrs. Molliere! You are the best!”

The lady who was called Mrs. Molliere presented a box to Joseph.

“Please enlist him in your majesty's troops.”

With eyes sparkling like boys, Joseph opened the box. Once looking inside, his face glowed even more.

“This! This is ancient Kaap period’s heavy magic knight! Such an excellent article! Mrs. Molliere, you are a wonderful person!”

Taking out the approximately 20-centimeter sized knight doll out of the box, Joseph gave a joyful voice.

After that, he took Mrs. Molliere's hand and guided her to the center of the room.

“Saahsaah, I want you to look at this! It’s ‘My World’!”

The entire room had been converted into one huge miniature garden. Mrs. Molliere's eyes grew.

It looked like a map imitating Halkeginia. A huge model.

“Oh dear! What a beautiful miniature garden! It is wonderful!”

“Gardening masters from the whole country were called to make it! It took an entire month to complete!”

“Is this a latest play model? Have you gotten tired of chess?"

“Nononono. I am not tired!”

“Oh dear! May I ask what is it? I always thought it was strange for it to be fun.”

“Why?”

“Because, there is no opponent at hand. Enemy's horse and ally's horse move according to you, what fun is there in that?”

“Sadly as you can see there are no opponents around here.”

Mrs. Molliere laughed bitterly. Though the king was rich and had a pretty face he was often despised because he was not skilled in magic. He was called an imbecile and stupid. Therefore…the king who spent an obscure boyhood, became crazy in solitude. He highly devoted himself to chess.

“Chess has no changes from the original formula, it follows a certain pattern to focus on. But this play is different!”

Joseph said, pointing at the miniature garden.

“Geographical features are made following reality - the horses, spearmen, bowmen, musketeers, knights, dragon knights, artillerymen, warships… all made imitating the original army, fights as well! To decide cavalry’s victory or defeat dice is used! As a result the outcome is always different and gives you a feeling of an actual combat!”

Mrs. Molliere was interested in playing the war together that the king spoke so fondly about, though she couldn’t really understand it… She was glad seeing his happy face.

“Then can I too be one of Your Majesty’s bodyguard troop?”

“With pleasure. Knight of the Parterre. You‘ll make a splendid knight.”

Joseph placed the knight doll that Mrs. Molliere had brought onto the miniature garden. Jokingly, Mrs. Molliere bowed.

“Oh dear! Honorable Gallian knight of the Parterre? I will be begrudged by everyone!”

“A toast for the most beautiful knight leader in the world!”

Joseph lifted up the cup at his side. A page ran up and filled it with wine. Then the page filled Mrs Molliere’s cup as well and passed it to her.

“And in this play, Your Majesty will be both - friend and foe?”

The woman asked gracefully drinking from the cup.

“Obviously. Haven't I told you? In this Halkeginia game I am not a figure. I am setting up the strategy… A clever, exact strategy! That’s how it is. Oneself who is triumphant is crushed by the hand of oneself… Like I said I am setting a play for this sandplay stage, like a playwright.”

“Oh dear, this miniature garden is really precise.”

Mrs. Molliere who was taking a long look at it felt admiration. Hills, mountains, rivers… Ups and downs were applied to match real geographical features, even the small buildings in the city and the village were detailed. On a pass stood a soldier doll.

“What kind of drama unfolds here? Please explain it to me more."

“Currently, that single blue army occupies this city.”

Joseph pointed at the city in a round rampart.

“Now it and the Red Army, which shut itself up in a city here, watch each others movements.”

He said pointing at the city standing on left from there. The city was lined with the building models of great dimensions. Many doll soldiers were placed there. There were also placed a few monsters and dragon figurines. There were also ship models.

“Now that’s where it gets interesting. A blue army is reveling to a victory! But Red Army uses an unexpected ‘Trump Card’ and reverses it!”

Such a child, Mrs. Molliere muttered in her mind. Domestic affairs and diplomacy were neglected due to the King’s craziness… These were the rumors.

And they were not wrong.

Joseph smiled and took the doll from the miniature garden.

It was a tall and slim female figure with dark hair.

Joseph placed the doll to his ear.

And, as if the doll spoke to him, Joseph nodded many times.

After that, Joseph spoke to the doll.

”That's right! Oh yes! Plans are underway! This is a colorful and fun plan indeed! Oh Muse! Muse's more than cute! Take a reward! However, now it's "stuffed"! I want to grab the toys, dolls, even more than I already have! I think it's time to get the plan underway!“

The look that Mrs. Molliere gave the Joseph who was talking to the doll was full of pity. He was not a king, he was not an owner of the pining pretty face, it was an eccentric behavior of the one who was never loved.

Compared to his younger brother who was good at everything... he was exposed to throne threats... to the whirlpools of political strife... which troubled Joseph's mind eventually.

“Your Majesty, Your Majesty… Aah, Your poor Majesty…”

Mrs. Molliere with a theatrical gesture patted Joseph's mandible. Joseph gently embraced Mrs. Molliere.

“Aah, Your Majesty… stop with the pranks…”

“Well, you see a dramatic reversal is the attempt to end the game. It must be decided – victory or defeat.“

While watching the two cities Joseph muttered… and called the page.

“Throw it.”

Page nodded and threw two dices. Joseph looked at the fallen eyes and nodded.

“Oooh, seven! Delicate number! Hmmm… In this case…”

After meditating for a while, Joseph called the minister.

“Minister. The imperial rescript.”

From the shadows a small man showed up and bowed.

Joseph lightheartedly informed the minister who moved the horse in the miniature garden.

“Summon the fleet. Blow off Albion’s enemies. You have three days to prepare.”

“As you wish.” Not showing any emotions, the minister bowed and left.

Mrs. Molliere started trembling while watching the display in utter shock.

It wasn’t a miniature garden play anymore.

Just now, the instruction to a real war was given.

“What’s wrong, Mrs. Molliere? Are you cold? Page, put more wood in the fireplace. The madam shivers.” Joseph ordered page in a steady voice.

“Your Majesty… Ooh, Your Majesty…”

“What is wrong madam? The leader of the Gallia's Parterre knight corps cannot embarrass herself with such cowardice."

On the day when the Advent Festival started… thirty leagues away from the snowy city of Saxe-Gotha, figures, wrapped up in dark clothes, walked.

“I’m getting used to… mountain walks.”

Muttered a tall man. A dauntless face peeped from the opening of a deep hood.

It was Wardes. Fouquet's face popped up next to him.

They were sent here as Sheffield’s guards.

However, Fouquet had another reason to be here.

“Mathilda of Saxe-Gotha - I think I heard this place’s name from somewhere before.”

Wardes said to Fouquet, who answered back while stepping briskly.

“So nostalgic. I never thought I would be walking through this mountain path again.” She gave out a white exhalation.

“Is it still a territory of Saxe-Gotha?”

“The ‘City’ also includes this mountain range.”

“This land belonged to you as your home?”

“The city's council has been in charge. Sort of like viceregal.“

“Still, it’s considerable.”

“I am guiding another to the land from where I was driven out long ago. How ironic.”

“Your father, I know that he somehow shunned Albion’s royal family… But why was this land and the tittle taken from you and your father?"

“That’s royal family lies.”

“Lies?"

“Indeed. My father dutifully served Albion’s royal family… But once the royal family told ‘Give it’ and he didn’t."

“Haah, and what was that?”

Fouquet laughed teasingly and looked into the man's face.

“I’ll tell you only when you’ll tell me your mother’s story.”

Then Wardes turned his face away. Fouquet snuffled in dissatisfaction.

“Hey, Jean-Jacques Wardes, whom do you love more – me or your mother?”

But then Sheffield, who was walking behind, called them.

“How close is the nearest river?”

Fouquet stopped, squat down, elbowing away the snow… and touched the soil. Fouquet, who was a triangular Earth element mage, understood the soil well. Besides, because she grew up in here, she understood the earth here even better.

“Far. But it is not the only water source… one third of the city wells take the water from the mountains.”

“That should be enough.”

Fouquet elbowed her way through bush… and reached a cracked rock. Though the snow covered it, the water was visible from the crack. Luckily the center was not frozen.

Sheffield took out a ring from her pocket. Wardes and Fouquet recognized the ring at first sight.

“That… isn’t it Cromwell’s ring?"

Fouquet muttered. Sheffield shook her head.

“No, it is different from Cromwell’s ring.”

A secretary calling the emperor by name? Wardes and Fouquet exchanged the looks.

“What are you going to do with the ring?”

Sheffield smiled. Because it was the first time they saw her smile, Wardes and Fouquet were perplexed.

“Water is considered a living thing and the Ring of Andvari has the power to control it… as it’s an element that looks like the water spirit. Or should I say it’s almost identical.”

“Hmm.”

“The water spirit’s tears are expensive material used in making various potions. The power of water rules the composition of the body… with a potion, one can manipulate both – body and mind.”

“That’s a nice lecture. Now then, tell what on earth you are going to do with it?”

“The power of water to condensate… In other words, I can manipulate the town with this…”

Sheffield’s body began to glow.

Wardes remembered this light. The left hand of Louise's boy-familiar glowed in such light as well. Immediately after that… his left arm was chopped off.

On Sheffield’s forehead, half covered with hair, an ancient rune glowed.

Wardes screwed up his eyes.

“What are you doing?”

Sheffield did not answer anymore. She seemed to have been concentrating. She thrust out the hand with the ring towards the water. Gradually, the ring began to shine… and melt.

It looked as if… it was melted by the heat of Sheffield’s body.

Melted drops of the Ring of Andvari began to trickle down… and then a strong stream of water broke through the crack and flowed towards the city of Saxe-Gotha.

Chapter Nine: Rout

It was the tenth day of the Advent Festival, and everything looked like usual.

Thanks to the continuous snow, the town turned into a world of silver.

A group of two Tristain soldiers was patrolling in town, and currently one soldier called to the other,

“Hey, aren’t they from Rossa’s patrolling unit?"

“Indeed. But what are they doing here?”

One of the patrolling colleagues group was standing in front of the inn and doing something in an surreptitious manner.

“Hey!” one called out. However, there was no answer. They just kept on working silently.

“Isn’t that a bag of gunpowder?”

One muttered in a hasty voice. And indeed a few sacks of gunpowder were placed there.

Rossa’s patrolling unit soldiers were carrying bags to the inn.

“Hey! It’s a hotel not a warehouse. Navarre’s unit soldiers are staying in there. It’s too dangerous to bring such easily explosive things inside.”

He approached and tapped soldier's shoulder. But the face that turned around shocked him. It was an expressionless and soulless face. Sensing something evil in that face, the guard raised his spear.

“Hey! Put the bag down! Put...”

At that moment, another soldier pulled out a pistol from his belt and shot the guard down.

Another guard tried to run away, screaming. But a dagger, thrown by the first soldier, sank into his back. The guard fell down with a thump.

Then they silently returned back to placing bags into the hotel.

Then a match cord was inserted and ignited with a flint.

After a few seconds, with a huge, exploding sound, the inn and all resident soldiers were blown away.

Located in the city's prime block, on the second floor of the inn coalition, the Allied Force's leaders were discussing the future strategy of the invasion.

“The truce will end tomorrow. Carrying the replenishment goods must be finished by tonight.”

Chief of the General Staff Wimpffen reported while looking at the parchment on the table.

“It will be on time. But I thought that during the truce Albion would try a surprise attack…”

“You think the other side does not have the same problems? They needed to buy time because enemy preparations were not complete. That’s why they settled for the truce so easily…”

Marquis Handenburg said gloomily. Wimpffen gave him a piercing glare. De Poitiers stepped between the two. As the main commander he understood the necessity to buffer subordinate generals’ conflicts.

But then… someone knocked against the door.

“Who? We are in a military council,” said Wimpffen.

“A delivery from the royal family. It came this morning.”

The delivered goods were a gorgeous punnet where the royal arms had been carved. A letter with the Finance Minister’s stamp was attached to it. The moment he saw it, the complexion of De Poitiers changed. He started to read the letter voraciously. After reading, De Poitiers muttered cheerfully.

“How generous of the treasurer!”

De Poitiers with his digit opened the box top. Wimpffen and Handenburg looked into it as well. Upon seeing what was lying in the box, both of their eyes popped wide.

“Ooooooooooh! A field marshal’s cane!”

Indeed, it was a splendid field marshal cane that was carved from ebony with a golden royal family's crest on it. Staring at his own reflection on it, De Poiters gave a joyful cry.

“Normally, there should be official regulations to pass. ‘This cane is reminder of the successful victories under your command.’ With a congratulation note from the Finance Minister. Though the war has not ended yet, the Allied Forces had a successive string of victories now. The enemy army shut itself up in the capital and will not come out. Encircling and winning a final victory was only a matter of time. The last decisive battle and it is said, and confirmed by finance minister’s signature, that I will command with the field marshal cane.”

“Congratulations, Your Excellency.” Handenburg and Wimpffen shook hands with him.

“Well… with all what has been said it is all in my grip. We cannot get too careless now, no carelessness!”

De Poitiers said, but could not hide a wide grin on his face.

Booom! Boom!

At that moment sounds of loud explosions resounded behind the window.

“What’s happening?”

With a suspicious expression on his face, De Poitiers approached the window, still gripping the field marshal cane.

The window was facing the plaza. There soldiers ran around pointing fingers at something. He noticed emblems on their capes.

“Aren’t they from the La Shien unit?”

This was the eastern block, while these patrolling units were responsible for the western side of the town. Why were they here? Moreover, why were they fully armed…

Marquis Handenburg stepped next to De Poitiers as well.

“They mustn't be soldiers from my army either. I did not gave an order to march…”

Then they both looked at each other…

Soldiers turned their guns aiming towards the two people standing at the window.

And then a sudden volley came.

The last thing that De Poitiers saw was a sight of the field marshal cane riddled by bullets, shattering it into small pieces.

Frozen from shock, Wimpffen saw De Poitiers and marquis Handenburg, who stood by the window, fall. He could not understand what was happening.

The next moment officers jumped into the room.

“Revolt! Revolt started!”

“Revolt?”

“Rossa’s unit, La Shien’s unit and part of Germania’s army stationed in town's Sai district caused the revolt! Their clashes with our army are happening in various places! It’s too dangerous to stay here!”

Then the officers saw shattered pieces of window and the bodies of De Poitiers

and Marquis Handenburg lying on the floor, and stood upright in front of Wimpffen.

“Y-your orders, Supreme Commander!“

The breakdown of the Allied Forces stationed in Saxe-Gotha happened fast.

Commanders were surprised by the sudden revolt. Or maybe one should say that the cause of the revolt was what made them confused. More so, because there were no reports about discontent rumblings from soldiers, nor disorders.

It’s as if revolt really started from nothing.

Soldiers were at a loss as well. Comrades-in-arms, with whom they fought and celebrated victories together until the other day now attacked them with lifeless expressions and weapons in hands.

“Shoot!”

Even if the commanders shouted so, musketeers could not pull a trigger, bowmen could not shoot the arrows, spearmen could not throw spears.

“…We c-cannot shoot, sir!”

“No! You idiots! Revolts are part of the enemy king’s army!”

Though the commander tried to cast a spell at the slowly approaching expressionless soldiers… he saw a commander in their front lines and shook his head.

“Marco! It’s me! Maurice! What are you doing?! Why are you turning your wand at us?!”

The only answer was a bullet. It hit the ground at his feet, and the commander ordered to retreat.

“Damn! Retreat! Retreat now!”

“W-where to retreat...?”

“As if I know! Retreat anyway!”

In the morning, the defensive lines were broken by the King’s army.

And… finally, a report from the Redoutable was brought by the dragon knight scout.

It said that Albion’s main army of Londinium began to move, aiming straight for the city of Saxe-Gotha.

On the outskirts of the city's temporary headquarters, Wimpffen made a decision. Obviously, as he was now the main commander of all operations.

“We‘ll retreat to Rosais. It‘s no use staying here.”

And the order to retreat was given to the whole army under his command.

The army that marched forward excited over the victory now returned as a defeated army, reduced to 30,000 people due to revolt. All faces looked exhausted and the mood of despair floated around.

General De Poitiers was a betrayer and organized the revolt, no, the general was killed, they all were manipulated by an unknown magic and were made to kill - within the defeated army, the truth mixed with various rumors.

However for commanding officers and soldiers such rumors helped to survive. Only animal-like survival instinct whirled in the heads of men who ran away.

The confusion became even bigger once it became clear that Albion’s main army joined the revolts in pursuit.

Troops of Allied Forces positioned in thin and long groups retreated down the highway that lead to Rosais.

Among them, there were Louise and Saito too.

With a sword over his shoulder, Saito called out to Louise who was trudging next to him. He hadn’t talked to Louise since the second morning of the Advent Festival when he returned to their room. But even though they hadn’t talked to each other for almost ten days… only poignant words came out.

“So where is this honor in war?”

Louise looked down.

“Look around.”

A group of officers rode pass them on horses at a full speed shouting, “Out of the way! Out of the way!” Infantry units, surprised, stood by the side of the road. Musketeer and spearman showed no reaction though. Everyone discarded their heavy weapons as they were escaping.

“Now they don't think they can survive. Yesterday they all were shouting 'Long live the king’s military victory! We have to win for the absolute justice to honor the fallen soldiers!', and now they're enraged at their own colleagues?”

“I hope Guiche and Rene are alright…”

Saito said looking distant.

Saito woke up with the shouts “Revolt! Revolt!”. He went to a temporary command headquarters… it was already gone. All the members had run away. After the messenger with an order to retreat came, they immediately left their weapons.

Saito turned around. Scarron, Jessica, Siesta and all the girls from the 'Charming Fairies' inn followed after them.

Why was there such an uproar and why was the order given to retreat? He ran after Siesta and the other people from the inn followed him.

“Sure I am an honorable Royal Army man. I do have to encourage the people to escape abandoning me, it is the highest honor.”

Louise kept on trudging.

“Do you understand now where the true honor lies? Do you now understand the meaning behind teacher's words? They all did… they just wanted to live, that’s why they tried so hard to escape.”

Saito rattled on with an aura of superiority. Mostly because he felt too depressed to talk about anything else.

“Disgrace.”

Louise finally opened her mouth.

“Disgrace? I like it that way. The honor of victory! Justice! Made a lot of noise, but in the end nature showed the truth and made them honest.”

The Allied Forces, including Wimpffen who arrived first at Rosais, asked for permission to return to their home country. The answer from the monarchic government prefecture that could not swallow the circumstances was short: “Withdrawal permission not given. Explain the circumstances in greater detail.”

Half the number of Allied Forces were killed or turned to the other side, De Poitiers was killed? The facts did not sound sane. They seemed to doubt if it was a real report. Was it not a fake report? Wimpffen could not blame the home government for that. *Perhaps, even I, after hearing such a report would not believe it spontaneously and be able to grant permission to withdraw.*

The defeated army was concentrating in Rosais.

Wimpffen began negotiation with his own country.

He insisted repeatedly that considering the way things were going, they were heading towards annihilation.

With great effort he gained the permission to retreat… after a half day; a very valuable half day. A half day that could be fatal for the Allied Forces.

As the defeated army began arriving… they received further bad news from a

dragon knight scout. Albion’s main army from Londinium was moving faster than expected.

The way things were going…

“At dawn tomorrow, the enemy's main army will burst into Rosais.”

He looked at the map and asked his subordinate,

“How long it would take for an army to fully embark?”

The logistics staff answered.

“Until the morning of the day after tomorrow. Though Rosais has giant port facilities for ships, on land, there can be only a limited number of soldiers at the same time.“

Wimpffen was worried. When you think about it – he needed to start withdrawal preparations before they were permitted. However, Wimpffen was scared for his own neck and did not want to be hung by a war tribunal.

“It is necessary to stop the enemy army’s pace first.”

“40,000… No, with the revolts the number is far greater. Where can we find an army to withstand it?”

In addition, the bombardment from the air would pull the withdrawal line to the fleet. Besides, ship guns would not help to adjourn the army marching.

Moreover, in order to gain more time, soldiers, who ran away at full speed, lost all their heavy amour.

Wimpffen thought.

And… suddenly he had an idea..

“…That’s right. Let’s use ‘it’.”

“It?”

“The trump card! The trump card of my army! Now it’s the time to use it!

Messenger!”

The messenger came to Louise when she waited for the withdrawal embarkation in the tent.

It was in the evening.

“Me?”

The older soldier seemed to have been in a very great hurry. He was like a living embodiment of the whole Allied Forces – always in a hurry.

“Miss Vallière! Commander Wimpffen calls!”

Only now Louise understood that General De Poitiers and Marquis Handenburg were killed. The confusion within the Allied Forces was considerable.

Louise went to face the commander, while Saito was sticking around. He had a bad premonition.

After taking the instructions, Louise came out of the commander's tent, ghostly white.

"What’s wrong? What were the orders?”

Even though he asked, she did not answer.

She looked straight ahead… and began walking towards the other end of Rosais. But not towards the embarkation tent.

She came to the temple on the side of the town… and received a horse from a horse keeper. Then the horse keeper bowed to Louise who tried to ride away.

Saito grabbed Louise's hand.

“Hey! Where are you going?! It’s not safe to leave the city!”

“Let go.”

Louise muttered in a lifeless voice. Feeling that something was not right, Saito shouted at Louise.

“Talk! What were the orders given to you?! Hey!”

Louise did not answer. She just kept on biting her lips.

With the other hand Saito took the order parchment from Louise. Since he could not read the letters the only thing he understood was a map.

“I can’t read. What is written here?”

Louise bit her lip again.

“Talk! What is written here?!”

Derflinger, on his shoulder, read it instead of Louise.

“Aaah, a backup. Not very honorable.”

“Backup?”

“Fufu, buying time for the main force to escape. Alone against enemy army of 70,000. Wonderful, isn’t it?”

Saito turned pale. He muttered blankly.

“What?”

“Quite detailed instructions actually. Hoho, wait on the hill 50 leagues on the left from here. Wait with 'Void' spells ready. Face towards the land route to see the enemy first and keep casting spells until you run out of magic. Neither withdrawal nor surrender are permitted. Haah, in other words, its an order 'defend till the end'. To put it briefly – fight against enemy until you die. That‘s what is this order about.”

“...Hey, what is that - a joke?”

Saito said grabbing Louise’s shoulders.

“No one is joking. It’s the truth.”

“Really, are you an idiot? You would die just because our generals told you to? They are treating you like a tool. No, a backup tool. Don’t do that! Don’t do that!”

“Stop being hasty.”

Saito was amazed.

Ahh, this look in her eyes… I remember it.

Louise hasn’t changed since the day they met.

Louise still wanted to be recognized.

She entered into this war against her parents’ will because… she wanted to be recognized.

She was nicknamed "Louise the Zero", idiot Louise.

Since those days… Louise dreamed to be recognized by her parents and her classmates. That’s why she applied for the Fouquet search.

However… once the legendary Void elements power awoke in her it changed.

She wanted to be recognized for more than just this.

Saito could not really understand it well. Neither could Louise. Therefore he tried to persuade her.

“Be reasonable. For your pride's sake? Look, it is not a safe inn, you are going to die here…Understand? Stop it, all right? You are great. I know that. But let's run away. Ok? Disregard such orders and flee. Ok?”

“Where would you run? It’s an enemy's territory.”

“Stop being so prideful!”

Louise looked straight at Saito and said clearly,

“It’s not because of pride. What would happen if I were to run away? Our allies will be annihilated. Your maid, everyone from the ‘Charming Faeries’ inn… Guiche, Rene – everyone. They might be killed. They might be shamed.”

Saito frowned, realizing that too.

The reason why Louise is so determined… was not just because of her pride.

“I do not want to die. But I do not want my friends to die either. That is… the true meaning of the word 'honor'. Hey Saito, you kept on saying that honor is stupid but what ‘honor’ were you talking about? It’s not because of a great honor that one dies for others. It is different.”

She explained. But Saito desperately kept on trying to persuade her.

“Then, do I also die? Just like you? Would you sacrifice me to save everyone?”

A familiar’s oath surely must be different from this!

Louise sadly watched Saito for a while… and shook her head.

“You run away. Don’t stay with me.”

“What?”

“Return back to the *Varsenda* and take your flying machine. Then you and your maid can fly to the east.”

Louise's eyes began to moisten. Louise’s voice sounded like she was about to cry.

“You… recently asked if you are just a tool for me. Don’t be stupid. If you thought that I felt you were a tool you misunderstood me. You are you. A free boy from a different world where he should return to. You are not a tool for me.”

“Louise…”

Saito looked away and said in a determined voice.

“I understand. I will not try to stop you anymore. However, I have one request before you leave.”

“Eh?”

“In my world there is a tradition, to drink a toast before a separation. You still have some time left, right?”

“Yeah, a little…”

Saito looked around and next to the temple he noticed a box of supplies. It must be one of the supplies that was meant to be sent to the city of Saxe-Gotha, but ended up being left behind. It was a box of wine. He instantly recalled Scarron’s complaints about Albion beer.

Saito took one bottle out.

“It will be stolen by the enemy anyway.”

Meanwhile Louise stared at the temple nearby. Then, she turned to Saito. Her cheeks suddenly turned crimson.

“Hey, Saito…”

“What?”

“Since we are making toasts anyway, I have one request as well.”

“Tell me. Ask anything you wish.”

But Louise’s request… surpassed all Saito’s expectations.

“Marry me.”

“…Huh?”

Louise, now red from head to toes, shouted.

“D-don’t misunderstand! It is not like I l-love you or anything! However… dying before being able to marry is unpleasant. I just want to marry!"

It was an empty temple - there was no one inside. When the Allied Forces occupied it, all the priests who were in there ran away.

Leaving the horse tied to the gate, two people entered inside.

It was clean and well swept.

The setting sun reflected through the stained glass, creating a solemn atmosphere.

Surrounded by this serene silence, Louise stood in front of the altar.

“You don’t wish to marry in Albion?”

Louise puckered up her brows.

“It just brings unpleasant memories.”

“You did this before, right?”

Louise nodded.

“Yes. However, at that time, I did not give my oath.”

“I see…”

Louise looked up at the Founder's image. Surrounded by the somewhat solemn atmosphere, she knelt before it and offered a silent prayer.

Louise thought while praying.

Why did I think about a wedding at a time like this?

Do I want it?

Just between me and Saito, without anyone else…

After all, I did not give a proper answer to Saito’s confession, there was no time to answer it either.

As this is the end, I am not afraid to show my feelings anymore.

But what are my feelings and why did I think about a wedding all of a sudden…

Her mind felt disordered and she could not find an answer.

When she finished a prayer and opened her eyes… Saito stood there with a glass of wine.

“Where is this glass from?”

“It was decoration on the altar. And I thought God would not mind me borrowing it for such an occasion.”

Louise smiled, taking the glass.

“That’s the second time.”

Saito said.

“What?”

“You smiled to me. Now and the time we went shopping, it makes it two times, right? Even though you don’t really want to marry me.”

Louise felt happy. Saito was counting her smiles.

“That’s right.”

However, she could not say it directly. Straightforward words didn’t come easy to her. It was frustrating.

But the Louise of today was different.

Louise matched Saito’s cup.

“I’m sorry that we won’t be able to search for the way to return to your world together.”

“Don’t worry.”

Two people drank their wine.

From the alcohol and embarrassment, Louise’s cheeks turned crimson.

“So how do we get married?”

“I don’t really know myself.”

“Is it all right? It won’t be done properly.”

“It’s all right. It’s you anyway.”

Not really knowing what to do, Louise clasped Saito’s hands.

“Now, give an oath.”

“But, there is no priest.”

“Stop complaining. Or do I have to do it for you?"

Saito looked straight at Louise and said,

“I love you, Louise.”

“Wha-…W-What…S-Stupid. It’s no good if you do not swear.”

Being told "I love you" so suddenly, Louise blushed furiously. Her body trembled with happiness.

“I am not lying. I am glad I was able to meet you. Really.”

Louise cast her eyes slightly down. *I have to say it, now or never*, she thought.

“I-I too…”

However, when she was about say that… a sudden drowsiness hit her.

“T-that? I…”

Suddenly the drowsiness became stronger. She could not see anything.

“You, the wine…”

She was not able to finish it. Strength and thoughts left Louise's body.

Saito caught the falling Louise. He took a small jar out of his pocket. It was the magical sleeping medicine, which Siesta gave him the other day.

“As expected. Magic is strong,”

He muttered, stepping outside with Louise in his arms. The evening sun almost finished setting and the surroundings became dim.

“Cold…” muttered a voice nearby.

“Aah, Familiar-kun.”

Next to the gates of the temple a beautiful boy with blond, nearly white, hair stood supporting himself against the wall with his arms crossed. His blue eye shone reflecting the setting sun.

It was Romalia’s priest and dragon knight Julio.

“You were spying on us again. What a bad hobby you have.”

“No, I just came here to pray. I am a priest after all.”

Julio answered, not dropping his smile.

“Anyway, take care of Louise.”

He was carefully hugging Louise close to his chest with both his hands, as if she was a fragile object, and said to Julio.

“Please go. And return safely to the ship.”

Saito placed her on Julio’s dragon.

“Thank you. Well, then.”

Julio called Saito to stop.

“Where are you going?”

Saito answered in a nonchalant voice

“I’m running away.”

“You are going in the wrong direction. Albion’s army is that way.”

“I know.”

Saito carelessly jumped on the horse, but Jullio called him to stop again.

“There’s only one thing I want to know.”

Saito answered.

“What?”

“Why are you going there? Surely you aren’t that foolish to die for *honor*, right?"

Saito thought for a moment… then puckered up his brows feeling relieved and shook his head.

“Because…”

“Well?”

“Because of *love*.”

Julio began laughing loudly.

“Aahaha, you sound like a true Romalian!”

With a scowl, Saito crossed his arms.

“No, it’s not because of love for a woman, but because my inner feeling tells me so.”

“Please teach me that meaning if you can.”

Saito looked straight up ahead and said.

“I cannot, putting it to words is already a lie. Words can always lie. Only my feelings cannot let me lie about it.”

Julio made a funny gesture with his finger.

“Am I saying such strange things?”

“You are not a noble, just like me, right?”

“Yes.”

“Yet you think just like a noble.”

“Are you trying to get under my skin?”

Saito took the reins in his hands, gripped them tightly, and kicked the horse’s sides.

And rode towards the darkening road.

Watching his back, Julio smiled and muttered softly,

“You are very clumsy, Gandálfr.”

Chapter Ten: The Place of Courage

On a little hill drawn on a map… The dawn brought forth light to the darkness.

The view slowly expanded, and the grassland below grew larger and larger.

It was as shown on the map, a rural area approximately 150 leagues southwest of the city of Saxe-Gotha. Saito had finally arrived there after a whole night of riding.

A light excitement embraced him. Although he had been riding all night, his fighting spirit and fatigue were restored by the morning light.

Through the morning fog, slowly; and accompanied with the shaking of the earth, a great army appeared.

Saito stood up and slammed his palm against the horse he had been riding. The beast, which had been chewing grass idly, was suddenly startled and fled back in the direction where they had come from.

“You are not going to use the horse?" Derflinger asked over the shoulder.

“That guy has a life too; it is not just some tool.”

“You have such a good heart, partner.”

Saito asked Derflinger, “Didn’t you say before that Gandálfr was able to stand against a thousand foes alone? 70,000 shouldn’t be a problem right?”

“That is what they say, but it is only a legend, so people tend to exaggerate. Don’t get too hopeful, in reality, it was probably less than a thousand.”

“…Why are you like this? Lying to me like that. If you lied, don’t tell me the truth. We are already as good as dead, so at least lie to the very end.”

On the horizon of the grassland they could see the advancing army. Although it was an army of 70,000, due the fact they were not marching abreast, it did not appear to be as large. But in reality, all 70,000 were there.

Soldiers wielding weapons, Mages armed with spells, cannons, demi-humans like orcs and trolls, dragon knights… Knights riding phantom beasts.

None were missing, all 70,000 were there.

Saito asked with a fear shaken voice.

“Ah, why must I risk my life to charge into that mob?”

“Why are you asking the obvious? Because our ships have to retreat, so we have to buy time.”

“No… I am not talking about that… But, forget it.” Saito let out a sigh. “Last time I was saved by Guiche’s mole, but this time there is no way we can escape.”

“No, we cannot. No matter what, just charge in. In a situation like this, no matter which direction, charging is the same. Aim for the commanding officer, strike down the head, and the body will fall into chaos. You can probably buy them a day or so.”

Saito nodded, holding Derflinger tightly. The runes on his left hand began to glow.

“Let me tell you something, Derflinger.”

“What is it?”

”Can I tell you a story from my childhood?”

“Sure.”

“I once saw an old lady being harassed by some punk near a train station, something about the old lady bumping into them. But at that time I was just a little kid, I couldn't stop them even if I wanted to, so I only stood by and watched. That time I thought, *if only I were a little stronger*, but at the same time, I also sighed in relief. Because even if I were stronger, it would not

guarantee that I would have won.”

“True.”

“No mistake, I am stronger now, there cannot be any excuses. That time I had no strength, so I had an excuse not to do anything. I was not strong enough, so I didn’t help. But now, I've lost that excuse. Because I am now very, very strong. No matter what, I am Gandálfr, right?”

Deflinger murmured lowly, “Um hum.”

“But… all that strength is only external, I am not really any stronger inside. Yet there is nothing I can do about it, although I am the legendary familiar Gandálfr, my body is shaking, I really don’t have any mental preparation. This type of situation is really not for me. Protecting everyone’s honor, I really don’t like it! I'm shaking with fear. I do not want to die.”

“Partner, you are really someone truly brave!”

“This kind of personality will only lead to trouble, fast.” Saito thought about it.

Courage, isn’t this what it is all about?

“Hey, Partner.”

“What?”

“Am I going to die?”

“Probably.”

The boy became silent. Derflinger decided to raise his spirits, “If it is going to be like this, then go out like a hero!”

“Why?”

“Because otherwise it would be a waste.”

Four hundred meters in front of them, they could see Albion’s forward assault force.

Suddenly his body began to move by itself; they would never know if this was the power of Gandálfr, or Saito's own bravery, or something else…

Saito charged toward the army of 70,000.

The first group of Albion soldiers who found the charging hero was not frontal cavalry, but the owl familiar belonging to an artillery commander. Because he didn't believe the infantries, he decided to personally investigative the matter.

After he verified the situation through his owl, he immediately ordered the firearm squadrons to prepare to fire, as during the course of a march, firearm troops do not normally keep their weapons loaded.

"What? Only one person?"

He was surprised when he found out there was only one person, but he became shocked once he saw the boy's speed.

It was not a speed that could be achieved by a human on foot.

The frontal cavalry also made the same mistake as well.

Because of a mistake with the estimation of speed, the opposition charged right past them just as they were stopping. Before the cavalry could even draw their weapons, they were knocked off their steeds.

The only thing the fallen cavalry men could do was hear the sound of the enemy's footsteps, the speed was so great that they could not even see their foe's image.

Before the soldiers finished loading their weapons, the enemy was already in front of their leader.

It was a person armed with a large sword.

The commander, in reflex, tried to pull out his wand, but was sent flying by the sword. Something hit him hard on the side of his head and he instantly lost consciousness.

The next moment, mage knights approached from the sky. They used magic and

familiars to track Saito’s movement and then released a barrage of spells.

Wind blades, ice spears, and fireballs flew in waves toward Saito, but were instantly absorbed by the sword. Though the knights were taken by surprise, they did not stop their magical assault.

The knight commander ordered his men to scatter; in the instant he made that order, a gust of wind blew next to him, where the wind struck, his wand was snapped in half and a foot slammed into his stomach. Ribs shattered, the pain was so strong the officer could not cry and soon fainted.

Derflinger asked Saito, “Why didn’t you kill them?”

Saito threw back a short reply, “I am not a soldier.”

“What do you mean?”

“Be they allies or enemies, I will not treat them as tools.”

Derflinger sighed.

Saito danced, dodged, and struck left and right, which caused massive chaos within the enemy formation.

Fighting alone turned out to be extremely advantageous.

To prevent friendly fire, the enemy did not dare to use firearms or projectiles, and with Gandálfr’s speed, nothing in this world could catch up.

But… the mage opponents were still very difficult to deal with.

Although Derflinger could absorb the endless barrage of spells, the amount of magic delivered was certainly above normal, and slowly the sword began to lose its ability to handle them.

“Ugh!”

“Left hand?”

“Hum, damn… I can’t move it anymore.”

Saito could only wield Derflinger with his right hand, his left shoulder took a deep wound, and part of his body was now charred by flame, which came from the fireball that exploded near him.

Although the situation was grave, Saito still charged forward, bravely standing tall while surrounded on all sides.

Due to the attacks by magic and weapons alike… Saito's injuries became graver every second.

Riding on his phantom manticore was the unit's commanding officer. He kicked his beast and prepared to charge, but a sword knocked him off his mount and he saw his manticore struck down. In that instant, his own legs were shattered and he collapsed on the ground.

The commander of the firearm division ordered his men to prepare for a maneuver, thinking about surrounding this wind-like enemy in an instant, but the enemy leaped over the formation, and struck the commander's head with his sword, sending the man instantly into oblivion.

The young commander in charge of the archers hastily ordered his men to fire, but the arrows could not reach their foe, instead striking down his allies instead. In the chaos he managed to hit his own foot.

The chaos among the forward guard became progressively worse. General Hawkins received reports that completely boggled him. The communications he received were a complete mess.

Some said, the enemy was a single rider.

Some said, the enemy was a magician.

Some said, it was a part of the enemy army.

Some said, it was elvish mage knights.

Some said, it was an elvish division… etc.

But the General, a veteran who survived a hundred battles, felt it was a single foe.

An enemy with the speed of wind.

An enemy with strength like fire.

An enemy unshakable like the stones of the earth.

An enemy elusive like the waves of the sea.

“I don't like it,” General Hawkins muttered.

Just as Saito broke the wand of a middle ranked officer, the boy spotted a group of mages. Since so many mages were protecting a single individual, that meant…

“That guy must have a pretty high rank...” Derflinger added. But even though Saito heard him, he couldn’t do much as his body began to be paralyzed by the pain. Very soon he wouldn’t be able to move at all.

He had to save his energy for breathing.

Just to take down one more officer…

Just to cause more havoc.

Just like this to extend the time, just even one minute, one second, must be taken.

This was Louise’s task.

A task my own beautiful master was going to carry out.

Saito rushed towards the enemy general surrounded by a horde of mages.

General Hawkins stared at the wind blasting toward him.

Truly amazing speed.

He pulled out his wand, chanted his spell, and in one breath summoned a wind blade. But… the enemy swiftly dodged it. He could only see the foe’s blade, flying toward his head.

General Hawkins could only see the shadow in front of him, as if trying to brand it under his vision.

His riders struck the enemy full of magic bolts, each attaching itself on to that swordsman’s body.

Although so many bolts should have been fatal, the wind-like warrior never slowed.

A fencer's sword shot up, slamming into Hawkins' body.

The blade’s tip reached within 5 cm of his face.

Hawkins, not averting his gaze, stared straight at the tip.

But it did not strike Hawkins’ face.

As if time suddenly stopped, the swordsman’s movement froze.

Hawkins used his wand to knock the sword away, and the unknown blademaster hit the ground with a thud.

“Your Eminence! Are you ok?”

“General Hawkins!” one of the knights rode by.

“No bones broken,” He answered.

“Combat is over, give me the report.”

Reports came in quick succession.

It was absolutely unimaginable that a single warrior was able to cause so much damage. Lower command, upper command echelon had 14 wounded, the enlisted infantry estimated injured were around two hundred and fifty.

The loss, from the entire army’s point of view, was apparently within the acceptable limit. But its effects were significant. The strong forward guards were now in complete chaos, many were injured by their own friendly fire in the fog of war, and the story that "everything was caused by a single swordsman" had spread among soldiers like wildfire, greatly damaging the morale of the troops.

The forward commander reported with a bitter face: “I am afraid it will take a while to reform the forward command, at least several hours.”

Also, stories continued to spread among the frightened troops, which greatly decreased the army marching speed. The enlisted soldiers were afraid the enemy might hide another swordsman like the one before.

The adjutant slowly murmured to General Hawkins,

“I am afraid we cannot meet today’s marching objectives. If the situation continues, we will have to waste half a day… no, an entire day of time.”

Hawkins lowered his head.

He got off his horse, walked near the fallen swordsman, and took in stock of his looks.

“He is just a boy.”

The body on the ground was a black-haired, very unusual looking boy.

Looking at him still breathing weakly, his body clearly had taken an enormous amount of magical damage; it was only a matter of time.

Hawkins wanted to summon a water mage, but after so many injuries it would only extend his suffering. Not even magic is infinite.

Hawkins looked down on the boy and whispered,

"I am really jealous."

"Huh?"

"A single warrior stopped an entire army... in the words of history long gone, he is a 'Hero'; I wish I was not merely a general, but a hero."

Hawkins’ voice trailed off.

His sub-commander nodded as well.

"What you say is right, but situations like these are the results of war, a pity he was an enemy of ours."

"Even though he’s an enemy... not even a noble... I believe he should receive the highest honor and respect."

"I understand your point."

General Hawkins and the sub-commander both saluted the boy.

"Let's bury him with honor."

He gave his order to his troops.

In that second, Saito's body leaped.

"What the hell?"

Saito's body reached his old speed, and vanished into the forest.

Once inside the forest… Saito’s body collapsed again.

A voice echoed in the dark forest.

Not Saito’s voice, but Derflinger’s.

“Haaah… it’s been one thousand years since the last time I used ‘Master’ was it? Though the reason I was able to move… was because of the absorbed magic

energy. Anyway, I'm beaten already... but partner, you look tattered...“

Saito’s body didn’t move in the slightest.

“Hey partner. Do you hear me? Hold on there, I’ll tell you something nice. At that time, that girl wore those black cat clothes just for you. She wanted you to push her down again.”

Derflinger waited for a while.

However, no matter how long he waited, there was no answer.

Once Derflinger’s power wore off, Saito’s hand lessened its grip. Free from Saito’s lifeless fingers, Derflinger muttered with regret,

“…tch, you can’t hear me anymore.”

Louise awoke and found herself on the deck of the *Redoutable*.

Because of the wind brushing her face, as well as the sound of the fluttering sail, she finally woke up.

Malicorne and Guiche were staring back at her face.

“Wow, Louise is awake!”

”Good! Good!!”

Seeing friends nodding their heads constantly, Louise asked in a surprised voice:

“I… why…?”

“We don’t know. When the ship departed I found you sleeping here.”

“…Here, this is a ship?”

As she watched the moving scenery for a few minutes, Louise suddenly

remembered a very important thing, abruptly springing to her feet.

“I, I must go stop the enemy army. I have to prevent the Albion army from catching up!”

Malicorne and Guiche both stared at her with surprise.

“Stop the enemy?”

“Yes! I have to delay the enemy to buy us time to retreat.”

“We already retreated.”

“This is the last ship from the port of Rosais.”

“…Oh?”

Louise looked confused as she stared from the forecastle, as the continent of Albion became smaller and smaller.

“How can it be? What happened to the Albion army that was chasing us?”

“They said they couldn’t catch up with us, although by a small margin”

“Good, Good, this means we can get home safely.”

“But when we get back, there will still be a lot of trouble.”

Malicorne and Guiche stared at each other, then the two started laughing.

What really happened?

Why did the Albion Army slow their march?

In that moment… she suddenly remembered something more important.

She could not see Saito anywhere.

Louise ran around the ship in a circle, and met Siesta and her family on the forecastle.

“Miss Louise… you woke up?”

“Don’t talk about it! Where is Saito?”

Siesta’s face turned white upon hearing this.

“I was waiting for Miss Vallière to wake up to ask it, shouldn’t Saito-san be with you?”

Louise shook her head, looking at her worried face, Siesta became paler every second.

“Miss Vallière, where is Saito-san? Where, please tell me!”

In that moment, they heard two soldiers talking behind them.

“I heard from a buddy from Navarre's ship, they said they saw a single person ride off to stop the Albion army.”

“Haha, stop joking, it is just one person, what can he do?”

Louise walked near one of the soldiers and said,

“Hey, what you just said, is it true?”

The soldier was surprised to be questioned by nobility, and showed a face full of shock and stammered,

“Yes, yes. But I don’t know if it is true or not, someone else told me this story, that part is true.”

Louise’s face lost all colors, the tint of blood instantly withdrew from every inch of her body. It must have been Saito. It was impossible to be wrong. *I don’t know what he did to make me fall asleep, then dropped me off on this ship… then went off against the Albion army.*

Louise ran up to the hedge and screamed

“Saito!!!”

“Miss Vallière, what happened? Please tell me, tell me!”

Worried Siesta pressed Louise.

“Saito!!!”

Louise screamed, jumped over the railing, and then tried to jump toward the ground.

“HEY! HEY! You want to die?!”

Guiche and Malicorne saw the situation, and grabbed her before she could leap.

“Let me go!!! I am begging you let me go!!!”

“NO! There aren’t any of our men on the ground anymore.”

“Let me go!!!”

Louise’s wails and howls echoed across the White Country's sky.

The Albion army that arrived at Rosais, looked up into the sky and ground their teeth.

They were just a hair away, but now they could not do anything but watch the allied army escape.

They would have continued the chase, but there were no ships left.

After occupying Rosais, Cromwell entered the red-brick base… then bit his fingernails in anger.

He already had General Hawkins, who failed to accomplish the mission, confined and sent back to Londinium.

“Why didn't Gallia send their soldiers? If they had been attacked from both sides by both countries, the Allied Forces would not have been able to leave Saxe-Gotha…”

He asked Miss Sheffield… who was nowhere to be seen.

Cromwell was nervous after losing a fight. He was afraid to carry this war any further. He was at the breaking point. He was at the point where he was shaking uncontrollably…

Shouts of joy sounded from the other side of the window.

When he stepped up to it…

He saw a large fleet piercing the sky.

On fluttering flags one could see two wands crossed… Gallia's fleet.

Cromwell went ecstatic.

"Ooh! Finally you came! As expected from the large country of Gallia! How many ships are there? But… why did it come now… after the enemy ran away?"

And once he bit his fingernail again, it hit him.

"That's right! They are going to chase the enemy fleet! That's good! Messenger come here, immediately!"

When he was about to call messenger… the messenger jumped into the room himself.

"Gallia's fleet! It arrived!"

"I know! I saw it myself! Now! Tell Gallia's fleet commander that- …"

The messenger interrupted Cromwell's orders.

"There's a message from Gallia's fleet, Your Excellency!"

"Message? Oh! I see!"

"They wanted to know your whereabouts in order to greet you!"

"Greeting? Is that so, ha ha ha! They are really very cordial! They have a cordial king and secretary, so the fleet commander must be too! Now, rise up an

assembly flag in front of the door."

"Understood." The messenger left.

After a few moments, in the courtyard, the Holy Assembly flag of the Republic of Albion was raised. After that, dozens of ships lined up around the building one next to another. It was a spectacular naval scene.

What kind of greeting would it be? He waited excitedly…

Then, before his eyes, the building's door opened and people ran out in panic. *Why are they running away from here?* Just like rats from a sinking ship.

He looked up at the fleet again. Hundreds of cannons from the gangway shone at the same time.

Cromwell hadn't seen anything more beautiful during all 30 years of his life.

Thousands of cannonballs, after an order to fire, hit the red brick building where Cromwell was.

And in an instant, the official base turned into a pile of rubble.

Epilogue

The left hand of God is Gandálfr, the ferocious shield of the lord. His left hand wields a large sword and his right hand wields a long spear, protecting me with endless vigilance.

The right hand of God is Vindalfr, the kind-hearted flute of the lord. He dominates all beasts of life, leading me through earth, sky, and water.

The mind of God is Myoznitnirn, the book that carries the crystallization of thought. It carries all knowledge and provides advice whenever I am in need.

There is one more person, but remembering its name gives me trouble…

Taking the four disciples, I came to this land…

From outside came the songs of children, along with the dawning lights, a young girl woke up. She slowly and somewhat lazily got up. Her eye-dazzling hair, like a wave of golden sea, like a cloak unraveling through her body. Her hair was so beautiful it would make people gasp, however, if one look closely, her hair would be half as thin as that of normal people. So when such beautiful hair moved, one could almost hear the sound of the air itself stroking it and the light from her hair could be absolutely blinding.

Even if you called her hair ordinary, the rest of her body was also very slim.

It was as though God himself carved her body. A slim waist compared to the outlines of big, firm breasts that lifted her nightclothes whenever she breathed, looked even bigger. The young girl wore only a single part of pajamas, and lightly yawned as she woke up.

From the way her skin shined, the girl’s age was about 15 or 16, but her delicate body, which had to be handcraft of a godlike being prevented anyone from accurately guessing her age.

The girl reached out and opened her window, and a group of children ran toward her.

“Tiffania onee-chan!”

“Tiffa onee-chan!”

A group of children following one another ran toward the window, screaming loudly to this young lady named Tiffania.

It appears this fairy-like beauty is these children’s idol.

“Ai Ya! What happened? Jack, Sam, Jim, Emma, Samantha, everyone came together. I listened to your songs and I woke up, you've been singing the same song again, don’t you know how to sing a different song?”

“Don’t know…!”

“In that case Tiffania onee-chan teach us to sing.”

Tiffania smiled, she considered these children to be her little brothers and sisters.

She suddenly realized one of the younger children had a look as if she wanted to say something.

“Emma what happened? Do you have something to say?”

The young girl called Emma shook uncontrollably.

“That…”

“Don’t be afraid, tell me.”

“In the forest… In the forest, I went to pick strawberries and I found…”

“What happened in the forest?”

“Emma what happened? If there is something you should have told all of us!”

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Because, I am very scared… the body was covered in blood… woo... woo,” Emma had a look of a girl on the verge of tears.

“Everyone stop picking on Emma. Emma, what happened? Tell big sister?”

“…there, there is someone, collapsed there.”

Tiffania’s face instantly became clouded.

“Again?”

The children began to talk among themselves.

“It is probably that, the war, the war!”

“Yeah!” The children nodded together.

“Because this morning, through that road near from here, an army of soldiers passed.”

Tiffania threw an overcoat over her pajamas, and leaped out the window.

“Emma, where is it?”

”…there.”

The young girl flew through the already familiar forest as if it was her backyard, with the children following behind.

They found a young boy lying by a thick tree, his back against the wood.

Tiffania squat down and placed her ear to the boy's chest.

“…Still breathing, but the wound is grave, I have to take care of this quickly.”

Emma worriedly murmured,

“Tiffania onee-chan, can he be healed?”

“Idiot!” One of the other youths yelled. “How can there be an injury Tiffania onee-chan cannot cure? Don’t you know anything?”

“Let's take him back to the village first.”

The boys lifted his body, Tiffania took a closer look at him.

“Black hair, wearing some clothes I've never seen before.”

“He is a foreigner.”

But he doesn’t appear to be from Tristain or Germania. Just where were his clothes from?

No…Tiffania shook her head and let out a small smile, *though truthfully I myself have a foreign blood as well* Tiffania thought. The soft wind slowly caressed her golden hair.

The hairs around her ears began to flow.

In that moment, one could see her hair reveal a pair of pointy ears.